

I agree that many players' careers have gone down because of this surface [Mirpur]. If I were a bowler, maybe my career would have improved playing here. Obviously, the Bangladesh team have developed [here] but it's been tough for batters.

Bangladesh captain  
Litton Das.



Most of the [Pakistan team] players have played in BPL. It is very important, obviously, to get their inputs... We have talked, and we have had a chat with them. They have given their inputs, and we have planned accordingly.

Pakistan captain  
Salman Ali Agha



Buoyed by their historic 2-1 T20I series win in Sri Lanka, the Bangladesh team looked upbeat and united during training yesterday, ahead of today's opening game of the three-match T20I series against Pakistan at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur.

PHOTO:FIROZ AHMED

## Young Tigers seal YODI series in style

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Under-19 men's team clinched the three-match Youth ODI series against South Africa with a game to spare after a commanding 104-run victory in the second match at the Willowmoore Park in Benoni yesterday.

The young Tigers followed up their 130-run win in the first match with another dominant all-round display, taking an unassailable 2-0 lead in the series.

After being sent in to bat, Bangladesh rode on half-centuries from Zawad Abrar (57 off 53), Rizan Hossan (52 off 71), and captain Azizul Hakim Tamim (67 off 90) to post a competitive 265 for six in their allotted 50 overs.

The hosts struggled in reply, failing to build partnerships as wickets fell at regular intervals. Although Jason Rowles scored a valiant 51 off 48 balls, the rest of the South African lineup crumbled under pressure, eventually getting bowled out for 161 in 30.2 overs.

Al Fahad led the charge with pace while skipper Tamim and Shadhin Islam contributed with spin, each claiming two wickets to dismantle the South African innings.

The third and final match of the series will be held at the same venue on July 22.

# Bangladesh aim to end PAKISTAN HOODOO

SPORTS REPORTER

Fresh off clinching their maiden T20I series over Sri Lanka, Bangladesh will be looking to continue their winning momentum in the shortest format when they take on Pakistan in the first T20I of the three-match series at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur today.

Against Sri Lanka, Bangladesh lost the series opener but bounced back with back-

back T20I series defeats to the UAE and Pakistan in the months prior.

The Tigers would be hoping to use this new-found positivity to end their sorry streak of results against Pakistan in T20Is,



● In 22 T20Is, Bangladesh have managed just three wins against Pakistan, losing the other 19. However, two of those victories came at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur -- the venue for the ongoing three-match series. The other win came in the third-place playoff at the 2023 Asian Games in Hangzhou, a tournament where both nations fielded second-string squads.

● The Tigers enter the series on a high, having recently sealed a 2-1 series win over Sri Lanka -- their first series triumph in any format this year.

● Monsoon showers threaten to disrupt all three matches, with rain in the forecast for Sunday. This marks only the third time T20Is are being played in Bangladesh in July, after previous instances in 2015 and 2023.

● Bangladesh are returning to Mirpur after nine months. Their last game at the venue was a seven-wicket loss to South Africa in a Test match in October 2024.

to-back victories to seal the three-match series 2-1, clinching their maiden series win over the islanders in their backyard across all formats.

The result was a breath of fresh air in Bangladesh cricket, following the underwhelming performance in the preceding ODI series against Sri Lanka, which they lost 2-1, and also the back-to-

a side they haven't beaten in the format since 2016.

"After losing the first game in Sri Lanka, we made a great comeback. Of course, the players have grown more confident," Bangladesh T20I skipper Litton Das told reporters in Mirpur yesterday before the team's only training session before the Pakistan series, after returning to Dhaka

from Sri Lanka on July 17.

"We will have the same mindset, the same goal -- winning the series. But we need to play good cricket in every game. What happened in Sri Lanka two days ago is already in the past. It's a new place, a new venue, so we need to take in everything afresh," said Litton, who was named the player-of-the-series in the T20I series against Sri Lanka.

Although, on paper, Bangladesh did beat Pakistan in the bronze medal decider of the 2023 Asian Games in Guangzhou, China, it is more of a misnomer, as both countries had sent a second-string team for the tournament, not the national side.

Even with that win, Bangladesh only have three victories over Pakistan in 22 T20I meetings and have lost the remaining 19 matches.

Litton, however, was not fazed by their poor record, saying, "Records are meant to be broken. If we play good cricket, it won't take too long to change this record. Instead of thinking about it, if we think about what we can do, our capabilities, and what quality of cricket we can play, it [record] will change."

On the other hand, Pakistan are banking on their players who have extensive experience of playing in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) and want to win all three matches to continue their dominance over the Tigers in this format.

"Most of the [Pakistan team] players have played in BPL. It is very important, obviously, to get their inputs... They have given their inputs, and we have planned accordingly," said Pakistan skipper Salman Ali Agha.

"We just want to play good cricket in every single game... If we can win 3-0, we'll be more than happy," he concluded.

## Puja hits brace in 5-0 win against Sri Lanka

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh brushed aside Sri Lanka 5-0 in their penultimate match of the SAFF U-20 Women's Championship on Saturday, maintaining 100 percent record in the four-team competition.

Puja Das scored a brace while Kanon Rani Bahadur, Trishna Rani Sarkar and Afeida



Khandaker scored one apiece in this comfortable, albeit a bit laboured victory for Peter Butler's charges at the Bashundhara Sports Ground.

The win kept the hosts top of the table with 15 points from five matches, three more than Nepal, who earlier in the day, thrashed Bhutan 8-0.

Nepal, who had lost 3-2 against Bangladesh in the first meeting between the two sides in this double round-robin format tournament, have 12 points from five outings. Bhutan have three points while Sri Lanka are yet to open their account.

The day's results mean Bangladesh will retain the title with a victory or a draw against Nepal in the last match of the competition on Monday.

If Nepal win by a margin of two or more goals, they will become champions.

Bangladesh coach Butler had opted to keep some of his key players at the bench in this contest, resulting in a rather lacklustre performance from the hosts.

Kanon broke the deadlock in the 25th minute before Puja doubled Bangladesh's lead in the stoppage time of the first half.

Butler brought on four of his key players at the start of the second half, and his side made more impression going forward but missed a few scoring chances. However, Puja's second goal in the 73rd minute, followed by Trishna's 86th-minute strike and a stoppage-time spot-kick from Afeida made sure Bangladesh secured a big victory.



PHOTO: STAR

Khandakar Abdus Swad secured his third consecutive men's singles title at the 39th National Badminton Championship, beating Al Amin Zumar 21-14, 21-04 in the final yesterday. Meanwhile, Urmi Akter's hatrick bid fell short as she lost to teammate Nasima Khatun 12-21, 21-17 in the women's singles final at the Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Indoor Stadium.

# ‘Love for the game’ still drives Rani Hamid at 81

At 81, Bangladesh's chess icon Rani Hamid remains an enduring source of inspiration. On International Chess Day, marking 101 years since FIDE's founding, she reflects with The Daily Star's Atique Anam on her journey, late start, memorable matches, and more.

The Daily Star (DS): You're one of the oldest active players in world chess. How do people react when you compete internationally?

Rani Hamid (RH): The respect I get is always very gratifying for me. Some chess players say, 'I played against you in that year and so on,' and I reply, 'I can't even remember whom I played yesterday -- how would I remember you?'

But the thing is, since I usually wear sarees, everyone remembers me. And I was the only player who used to wear sarees. There was another lady who used to wear sarees, but not a player, though -- she was the mother of Vishwanathan Anand in his early playing days.

DS: Last year, [former world champion] Susan Polgar shared a photo with you on her social media account, highlighting your career during the Chess Olympiad in Budapest. What did it mean to you?

RH: I consider it as my luck. If it wasn't luck, how would I be in Hungary playing the Chess Olympiad? I wasn't supposed to be there. I was not granted a visa here for not having an old passport with me. But someone from the team couldn't go, so I got a second chance to sort my visa issues. And then I went there and

won the first six matches of the event.

DS: Most people your age spend time relaxing with family or enjoying quiet hobbies. What drives you to stay so active and continue playing competitive chess?

RH: The inspiration or strength basically comes from the love for the game. For example, an angler keeps staring at his fishing rod for hours on end. Where do you think this patience and perseverance come from? It's from the love for what he's doing. The same applies for me.

DS: Let's go back to the beginning. You didn't take up chess seriously until later in life. How did your journey with the game first begin?

RH: My chess career is basically a result of the interest and push from my late husband, Lt Col Hamid, who, as you know, was involved in many sporting bodies of the countries in various ways. I was a homemaker with four kids at that time and didn't even go out much. It was due to his insistence that I



became a chess player. I was blessed to have had him as my husband, because not many husbands give their spouses that much freedom.

DS: You began playing seriously at around 33 or 34. Was it a gradual process of falling in love with the game?

RH: Not really. Even when I was five or six years old, I used to sit by my father and watch him play very carefully, even though I was a bit restless. I had this strange attraction to the game, although I hardly understood it at

that time. And there wasn't an opportunity to play formally at that time. But I was very active in school sports -- including carom, basketball, racing, badminton etc. -- and I excelled in most.

DS: Was there a particular moment or event that sparked your transition from homemaker to competitive chess player?

RH: Well, the father of a school friend of my daughter, Dr Akmal Hossain, was the Pakistan champion at that time. So, I asked my daughter to bring him to our house, and one day, he did come. I used to play a little bit at that time but after playing against him, I realised how good he was. Practising with him helped me improve fast.

DS: You've won the national championship 20 times and the British Open three times. Which of those achievements do you value most?

RH: Every title is important. The national title gives you the privilege of getting guest of honour invitations from different chess tournaments around the world. But winning the British Open was a different feeling because of beating our colonisers at their own home.

DS: Are there any particular matches or

moments that you still remember with fondness?

RH: In the past, I had memorable matches against many big players. I can remember once I had kept Anand rooted to his seat for half an hour. He would usually make a move and then roam around -- wouldn't spend more than five minutes on one move. But I kept him thinking for some time. When I went to the washroom, I saw his mum pacing up and down. I told her, "Don't worry, your son is winning. I have just made a wrong move."

DS: Any special performances you look back on with pride?

RH: There was one when I played a Women's Grandmasters tournament in Hyderabad. I beat the women's world No 3. The next day, the Indian chess magazine ran a story on the game, praising me heavily. Then that woman went to the editor of that magazine and verbally attacked him, saying she had let me win the game. Back then, I was in good form -- I also drew against the world No 2 and then I beat the U-18 women's world champion. But that form didn't continue after I suffered a road accident in 1992, and some of my playing partners left the country.