

Spotting chinks in India's armour

EKUSH TAPADER from Dubai

In Sunday's Asia Cup Super Four clash with Pakistan, India dropped five catches in Dubai. After yet another one-sided win over their arch-rivals, the first question inevitably centred on those missed chances.

India captain Suryakumar Yadav answered with humour in the post-match presser, but also admitted such lapses were a warning sign for sterner contests ahead.

Indian analysts believe the team still have not played its best cricket in the regional tournament. Yet, even without hitting full stride, they have shown how far ahead they are of the rest.

Asking in which areas India are ahead almost seems redundant. The real question is: in which areas are they not? Among Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, the balance might tilt occasionally, but against India the gulf remains overwhelming.

Suryakumar's comments after beating Pakistan for a second time in a week carried a hint of arrogance. "If two teams play 15 or 20 matches and it's 7-all or 8-7, that's a rivalry. But 13-0, 10-1... this is not a rivalry anymore."

Still, the Indian camp quietly concede that Bangladesh and Sri Lanka could be trickier opponents. One Indian journalist noted that "India really do consider Bangladesh and Sri Lanka tougher opponents than Pakistan now; at least in this tournament."

Even Suryakumar hinted as much when he said of the dropped catches: "We have more crucial games to play ahead."

His own form, though, raises doubts. His duck against Pakistan suggested that the outside noise since the politicised handshake saga might be affecting one of the most prolific batters in the shortest format.

On the other hand, the same cannot be said for their younger guns. The Indian Premier League (IPL) has helped forge a battle-hardened breed, and many who did not make this squad could walk into rival teams. Opener Abhishek Sharma's back-to-back first-ball boundaries off Pakistan star pacer Shaheen Afridi underlined that the newbies on the block seem to thrive on pressure.

Support Sri Lanka tonight?

As the Asia Cup shifts briefly to Abu Dhabi today, Sri Lanka and Pakistan face off Super Four clash, each coming off losses in their previous matches. India sit comfortably at the top of the table with a run rate of 0.689, while Bangladesh (0.121) occupy second place, just ahead of Sri Lanka (0.121) and Pakistan (0.689). As things stands, even without beating India or Pakistan, the Tigers still have a path to the final. Sri Lanka could play a crucial role here, just as they did earlier in the tournament when a win over Afghanistan helped Bangladesh progress past the group stage. If Sri Lanka can edge past Pakistan but lose heavily to India in the Super Four's final fixture, Bangladesh's task is simple: avoid heavy defeats and eventually end up with a superior net run rate.

Still, nothing is guaranteed. In T20s, the gulf between teams narrows, and even star bowlers can have an off day.

India do have a soft spot in that regard. Pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah looked off-colour against Pakistan, conceding 45 in his four overs. "He hasn't been himself right through this tournament," commentator Harsha Bhogle observed. Bangladesh will hope that slump lingers a little longer.

Then there's the batting. The Asia Cup's top run-scorers feature Abhishek at the top, while India's next representative Tilak Varma sits at 13th. The fact that India's middle and lower order have remained relatively untested, it's something Bangladesh could exploit if they remove the top order quickly.

Liton Das and his teammates know this will be their biggest test yet. They've focused on rest as much as training since beating Sri Lanka -- having completely rested on Sunday, and trained only in the evening on Monday, with Tuesday already marked as a rest day -- conserving energy in the punishing UAE heat for back-to-back games against India and Pakistan on Tuesday and Wednesday.

Head-to-head T20 record shows Bangladesh have only beaten India once in 17 attempts. At the end of the day, though, even the strongest sides can have bad days -- such is the nature of the sport. For the Tigers, that faint sliver of unpredictability is the hope to cling to.

A defeat to India would not invite much criticism, but any unexpected success would be cherished.



NO HANDSHAKE only in cricket!

Less than 24 hours after Indian players refused to shake hands with their Pakistani counterparts for the second time in cricket's Asia Cup 2025 in Dubai, teams from India and Pakistan met on a football pitch for the first time since April's Pahalgam attack and the subsequent conflict between the two nuclear-armed neighbours. The SAFF U-17 Championship fixture saw the two captains -- India's Denny Singh Wangkhem and Pakistan's Abdul Samad -- shake hands and exchange pennants. Players from both sides did high-fives, both before and after the match, and performed all the necessary formalities that are typical of the beautiful game. For the record, India won the keenly-contested match 3-2, setting up a semifinal clash against Nepal while Pakistan will square off against Bangladesh in the other semifinal.

PHOTO: SAFF

'Gentleman's game' no more

AFP, New Delhi

India's and Pakistan's refusal to shake hands during their Asia Cup cricket matches bent the code of the so-called "gentleman's game", as sport once again served as a proxy battlefield.

The tournament marks the first meeting between the nuclear-armed neighbours since their armies clashed in May -- a four-day exchange of artillery, drones and missiles that killed more than 70 people.

The handshake snub is the latest example of how cricket mirrors politics between the two countries. The cricket-

mad neighbours have already met twice in the Asia Cup T20 tournament this month, played in the United Arab Emirates as a neutral venue.

On September 14, India captain Suryakumar Yadav said his refusal to shake hands with his Pakistani counterpart was "aligned with the government" -- a move Pakistan said had "disappointed" them.

When they met again on September 21, neither side offered the traditional handshake. Both skipper kept their eyes and hands down after the toss.

**Read full story on *The Daily Star* website.

BCB polls: SC chamber judge stays HC order on president's letter

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court chamber judge on Monday stayed, until September 28, a High Court order that had suspended the effectiveness of a letter from Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Aminul Islam Bulbul, directing district and divisional sports associations to nominate councillors from ad-hoc committees for the upcoming board election.

Chamber judge of the Appellate Division of the SC Justice Farah Mahbub passed the stay order following a petition filed by the ministry of youth and sports challenging the HC order. Barrister Mahin M Rahman represented the BCB during the hearing.

The apex court chamber judge also adjourned hearing of the matter till September 28, additional attorney general Md Arshadur Rauf told *The Daily Star*.

Earlier in the day, four individuals -- ABM Monjurul Alam Dural from Rajbari, Josimuddin Khan Khosru from

Gopalganj, Moyeen Uddin Chowdhury from Laxmipur and AKM Ali Imam Tapan from Tangail -- had submitted a writ petition challenging the legality of the letter sent by the BCB president.

In the petition, the petitioners prayed to the HC to stay the operation of the letter issued on September 18, in which the regional associations that nominated councillors from outside of the ad-hoc committees were told to resubmit their nominations for the draft list.

The petitioners claimed that the BCB president had no authority to reject the nominated councillors as an election commission for the polls was already formed on September 7. They also claimed that 53 of the 72 nominations were getting cancelled because of it.

The HC bench of Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah and Justice Bishwajit Debnath ordered a stay for 15 days on the operation of the letter and also issued a rule asking the authorities concerned of the government and the BCB to explain in 10 days why the letter

should not be declared illegal.

Lawyers Md Ruhul Quddus Kazal and Md Rafiqul Islam appeared for the petitioners while additional attorney general Md Arshadur Rauf and deputy attorney general Abdullah Al Mahmud Masud represented the state during the hearing.

On August 21 last year, the ministry of youth and sports dissolved the executive committees of all divisional, district and upazila sports associations after the fall of the Awami League regime in the face of a student-led people's movement.

On August 27, NSC issued an outline on how a seven-member ad-hoc committee would be formed for the associations. Since then, it has been approving ad-hoc committees in regular intervals, which are running these regional sports bodies.

Ahead of the BCB polls, the NSC had sent out letters to district and divisional sports associations to nominate councillors for the election within September 17.

The BCB first pushed back the deadline to September 18, then again to the 21st. The BCB polls is scheduled on October 6.



BANGLADESH'S FIXTURES

- October 2, vs Pakistan, Colombo
- October 7, vs England, Guwahati
- October 10, vs New Zealand, Guwahati
- October 13, vs South Africa, Visakhapatnam
- October 16, vs Australia, Visakhapatnam
- October 20, vs Sri Lanka, Mumbai
- October 26, vs India, Mumbai

SQUAD

Nigar Sultana Joty (capt), Nahida Akter, Fargana Hoque, Ruby Haider, Sharmin Akter, Sobhana Mostary, Ritu Moni, Shorna Akter, Fahima Khatun, Rabeya Khan, Marufa Akter, Fariba Trisna, Sanjida Akter, Nishita Akter, Sumaiya Akter

Federation Cup promises intense competition

SPORTS REPORTER

The curtain rises today on the Federation Cup at two different venues, promising a competitive tournament as mid-table teams have bolstered their squads by signing players from the SAARC region to close the gap in local talent.

In today's Group B fixtures, defending champions Bashundhara Kings will face Fortis at the Bashundhara Kings Arena, while crowd favourites Mohammedan take on Bangladesh Police at the Shaheed Dhirendranath Datta Stadium. Both matches are scheduled to kick off at 2:45 PM.

Last season's Federation Cup race was largely dominated by the big-budgeted clubs -- 12-time champions Abahani, 11-time champions Mohammedan, and four-time champions Bashundhara Kings. Interestingly, none of these three giants opted to sign players from South Asia. In contrast, mid-table teams such as Bangladesh Police, Fortis, Brothers Union, and Rahmatganj have brought in SAARC players, considered to be on par with the top local talents -- complementing their squads alongside three foreign signings



allowed under the international player quota.

Kings have already asserted their dominance by clinching the one-off Challenge Cup with a convincing 4-1 win over Mohammedan on Friday. Meanwhile, Abahani are expected to field a stronger side than last season. Still, with the growing strength of mid-table teams, it wouldn't be surprising if one of the traditional "big three" fail to reach the grand finale scheduled for April 10 next year.

"Except for Bashundhara Kings and Abahani, there's hardly any difference among the remaining teams, which makes this Federation Cup highly competitive," Mohammedan coach Alfaz Ahmed told *The Daily Star*.

He admitted that his team lacks cohesion due to limited preparation, primarily caused by the absence of key national players during pre-season.

Bangladesh Police are expected to pose a serious challenge to Mohammedan, having already defeated them in a pre-season warm-up match.

"Police are enjoying better facilities -- ranging from performance analysts to improved accommodation -- which has mentally prepared our players to deliver something special," said head coach Asifuzzaman. He believes the psychological edge gained from the earlier win against Mohammedan could prove crucial.

Asifuzzaman also emphasised that teams like Police, Fortis, Rahmatganj, and Brothers Union have a realistic chance of causing upsets.

Fortis coach Masud Parvez Kaiser echoed the sentiment, expressing confidence in his team's ability to beat any opponent on their day -- just as they did last season by defeating Bashundhara Kings in the Federation Cup.

However, Kaiser voiced concern over maintaining consistency, with the Federation Cup and the upcoming Bangladesh Premier League facing a prolonged break from September 29 to November 23. This suspension is due to international commitments involving the national team and Bashundhara Kings, and may affect the players' rhythm and form.