

Tigers ready to step out of comfort zone

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After an ODI series in Mirpur, where Bangladesh fully capitalised on home advantage against the West Indies, the Tigers are set to embark on a new challenge against the same opponents today -- this time in the T20 format in Chattogram, a venue that offers the closest thing to a neutral setting for both sides.

With around four months left before the next ICC T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka, Bangladesh have only six T20Is scheduled -- three each against the West Indies and Ireland -- and skipper Litton Das wants those matches to be as challenging as possible.

"Honestly speaking, I want our players

» Bangladesh have won four successive T20I series since July this year -- their best ever run.

» Bangladesh have also won their last three T20Is against the West Indies, whitewashing them in a three-match series in the Caribbean in 2024.

» However, West Indies remain slightly ahead in overall head-to-head -- winning nine of the 19 T20Is against the Tigers. Bangladesh won the other eight, with two matches yielding no results.



PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

to be challenged in the two series," Litton said about the West Indies series and next month's home series against Ireland at the pre-match press conference on Sunday.

"I want the bowlers to be under pressure when bowling; it would help us in the upcoming World Cup," he added.

Bangladesh enter this series having won their last four T20I series -- against Sri Lanka, Pakistan, the Netherlands, and Afghanistan.

A series win over the Windies would extend their streak to five consecutive series victories. However, the management's decision to abandon their usual approach of maximising

home advantage to ensure 'winning momentum' ahead of the World Cup deserves credit.

It marks a significant change in mindset following the ODI series, which Bangladesh won 2-1, but faced heavy criticism for doing so on the slow, spinning Mirpur surface perfectly tailored to their strengths.

Still, the visitors fought well in the ODI leg, levelling the series 1-1 with a Super Over win in the second match before being blown away by 179 runs in the decider.

Both teams have now travelled south to Chattogram for a three-match T20I series -- a city where, surprisingly, the West

Indies have never played a T20I before.

The Caribbean side have played only three T20I series in Bangladesh, the last one in 2018, which they won 2-1. However, they have never featured at the Bir Shreshtha Flight Lieutenant Matir Rahman Stadium, the venue for this series.

The ground is not entirely unfamiliar to them, though, as the West Indies have played three Tests and two ODIs there, while several of their players have also featured in Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) games at the venue.

Chattogram currently offers arguably the best batting surface in the country, edging out the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium, which produced low scores during the latter stages of the recently concluded National Cricket League T20.

Even recent statistics support that claim. Since 2018, in all competitive T20 matches -- including both international and domestic fixtures -- the average run rate in Chattogram stands at 8.41 per over, higher than Sylhet's 8.02.

Facing a West Indies side ranked three spots above ninth-placed Bangladesh in T20Is could truly test the hosts if the wicket plays true, as it usually does in Chattogram.

With skipper Litton back in the fold following an injury and Bangladesh's recent form in the format, the hosts begin the series as favourites -- but they will need to be at their best against the former T20 World Champions.

Tigresses avoid last-place finish in World Cup

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Bangladesh's hopes of matching their best-ever ICC Women's World Cup record were dashed, but they avoided a last-place finish as their final league fixture against India was washed out in Navi Mumbai yesterday.

The Tigresses, who needed a win to equal their 2022 record of two victories, ended their campaign with one win, five defeats, and a no result. Their only win came in the opener against Pakistan. With three points, Bangladesh finished seventh -- above bottom-placed Pakistan on net run rate.

Put into bat in a rain-hit contest, Bangladesh reached 119 for nine in 27 overs after multiple interruptions. Sharmin Akter top-scored with 36 off 53 balls while Sobhana Mostary added 26 off 21 balls, but regular breakthroughs kept Bangladesh in check.

After skipper Nigar Sultana Joty's run-out, a 38-run stand between Sharmin and Mostary steadied the innings before Radha Yadav (3-30) triggered a collapse that saw Bangladesh slide from 91.3 to 117.9. Joty made nine off 24 deliveries.

Chasing a revised target of 126 in 27 overs, India were cruising at 57 without loss in 8.4 overs when rain returned to eventually end play.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Real snap Clasico losing streak to stay top

Real Madrid broke a four-game losing streak in Clasicos with a 2-1 win at home over Barcelona to move five points clear of their bitter rivals at the top of LaLiga on Sunday. Jude Bellingham scored the winner and assisted Kylian Mbappe for the opener, as Xabi Alonso got a victory in his first Clasico as a manager. Fermin Lopez scored the only goal for Barcelona, while Pedri was sent off for a second yellow in the final minute of stoppage time.

Afif hattrick, Naeem's 11k runs headline NCL Day 2



Khulna Division's Afif Hossain stole the spotlight on day two of the National Cricket League's (NCL) first-round matches, claiming six wickets, including a hattrick, to bundle out Barishal Division for 126. Elsewhere, Abu Haider Rony's unbeaten ton powered Mymensingh to 401 against Sylhet. Rangpur's Naeem Islam crossed 11,000 first-class runs with his 34th century, while Chattogram's Hasan Murad bagged a six-wicket-haul.

» Afif finished with figures of 6-31 -- his second five-wicket haul in first-class cricket -- and became the 19th bowler to take a hattrick in Bangladesh's first-class circuit. His best remains 7-66 against Rajshahi in 2018. After enforcing the follow-on, Khulna had Barishal at 119-4 at stumps, still 68 behind in Khulna.

» In Sylhet International Cricket Stadium, Rony struck an unbeaten 107 off 105 balls, with 10 fours and six sixes, guiding

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As Bangladesh gear up for their second friendly against Thailand, coach Peter Butler acknowledged the hosts' quality but praised his players for their positive attitude and focus in training.

The match kicks off today at 5:00pm (Bangladesh Time) at Bangkok's 72nd Anniversary Stadium.

After criticising his players'

attitude in their 3-0 loss to Thailand on Friday, Butler said he was pleased with their improved mindset during recent training sessions at Rom Sai Football Ground, viewing the encounter as a vital step in their preparation for next year's AFC Women's Asian Cup in Australia.

"I've been pleased with the girls," he said. "I've spoken to a few individually, and I'm happy with their approach and focus -- especially a couple who can be real

match winners but didn't show their true potential the other night."

The coach admitted to tweaking the system slightly but was content with how the team played overall. "We've changed the system a little bit. I thought they actually played the better football, though some elementary mistakes -- like conceding early -- cost us."

When asked about aiming for victory, Butler offered a dose of realism. "Can you tell me the

last time Bangladesh won in Thailand? Maybe sometimes you have to be careful what you wish for. We're building momentum, but we have to be honest -- we're not yet at Thailand's level. They're a very good side, with depth even on the bench."

He added, "We must aspire to their professionalism before dreaming of big wins. I want to win, but I live in the real world, not La La Land."

