Star SPORT
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What to WATCH
T SPORTS
Bangladesh vs Ireland
1st Test
Live from 9:30 am

A fresh start for SHANTO IN SYLHET

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI *from Sylhet*

Najmul Hossain Shanto is set for a new beginning when the Tigers face Ireland in the first Test of the two-match series at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium today.

Shanto will return as a leader with renewed purpose.

After disagreements over the Bangladesh Cricket Board's 'three-captain policy', Shanto had stepped away from the role earlier this year.

Now, reinstated as Test skipper, he openly admitted that the system had made him uncomfortable. During the pre-match press conference yesterday, he was calm but honest.

"Yes, I did feel that way [about the three-captain system] at one point and there were sufficient reasons behind it," Shanto said, making it clear that he still values clarity and freedom in leadership.

The setting in Sylhet holds special meaning for him. It was here, in 2023, that he began his stint as Test captain and led Bangladesh to a memorable win against New Zealand on a sporting track.

Back then, everything seemed to click -- the conditions, the team spirit, and his own form. Later, he was even handed leadership in all three formats. But times have changed. The current squad features captains of all formats coming together again for this Test, creating a delicate situation for balance and authority.

Still, Shanto appears more assured this time. He shared that he had spoken with both T20I captain Litton Das and ODI captain Mehidy Hasan Miraz about working together.

"We sat together and communicated about how to take our team forward in three formats and what areas we need to improve in. This communication has happened between the three of us. And all three of us are optimistic that we can take the team forward in the way the team needs," he explained.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Many inside sources have said that in his first term, Shanto was not always free to take the decisions he wanted. But he now feels more confident after recent talks with the BCB high-ups.

"I am convinced that the board will provide me with that help about things which were in my mind -- that maybe a problem could arise, or that the three-format system was not logical. But, when such senior cricketers or former cricketers of the board who are now present give a suggestion, they definitely think of good things. So, trusting that, I have returned," he said.

With the captaincy questions settled for now, attention turns to his batting. Shanto knows his team will look to him for stability at the crease. The last series in Sri Lanka, he struck tons in each innings of the first Test. One of the key reasons he was handed captaincy of all three formats in 2024 was his batting.

"As a batter, when you can score a ton in Test cricket, it always brings good feelings but the main focus would be how much I am contributing as a batter," he said.

The Sylhet pitch looks good for batting, though Shanto hinted at wanting a fair balance. "An instruction has been given on behalf of the team to the groundsmen. I hope that the wicket will be good, a sporting wicket is what I hope for," he added.

For Shanto, this Test is more than just a match--it's a chance to rebuild trust, lead with clarity.

Hosts disappoint in compound events

SPORTS REPORTER

Hosts Bangladesh's hope of producing something good in compound events of Teer 24th Asian Archery Championships took a jolt after women's team fell short of securing a bronze medal while the three archers were eliminated from the individual events at the National Stadium on Monday.

However, three male recurve archers moved into the round of 16 beating their respective rivals in the elimination round.

Bangladesh compound women's team beat Kazakhstan by 230-226 points to move into the semifinals where they lost by 234-227 points against India. Then they lost the bronze-medal match against Iran by 227-224 points.

Nawaz Ahmed Rakib, Sohel Rana and Ashiquzzaman also disappointed in men's compound individual event in the first round, leaving Himu Bachhar as the only compound archer with a chance of winning a medal.

Mithila Akter, too, was eliminated from the first round while Bonna Akter, Pushpita Zaman and Kulsum Akter are set to play in the round of 1/16 after getting byes in the first round.

In recurve men's team event, Bangladesh were eliminated from the pre-quarterfinals despite a brilliant start in the first round where they handed a straight 6-0 set points defeat to Vietnam. Against South Korea, though, they lost by 5-3 set points in the pre-quarterfinals.

It was a mixed journey for the local recurve archers as Rakib Mia and Abdur Rahman Alif moved into the round of 1/16 but Olympian Sagor Islam suffered a 6-4 defeat to Le Quoc Phong of Vietnam in his first elimination match. Ram Krishna Saha, who finished ahead of all Bangladeshi recurve archers having ranked 10th, will play his first match of 1/16 round today following two byes.

SHORT CORNER

Bangladesh in tough group in AFC U-20 Women's Asian Cup

Bangladesh have been drawn in Group A with former champions China, hosts Thailand and Vietnam in the upcoming AFC Under-20 Women's Asian Cup set to take place between April 1-18 next year.

BFF condemns Asif Akbar's 'derogatory' remarks on football

Terming the recent remarks made by Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) director Asif Akbar about football as "extremely derogatory, insulting, and alarming," the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has formally condemned the comments in a letter addressed to BCB president Aminul Islam Bulbul on Monday.

Gallery tickets for India match sold out in 'six minutes'

The gallery tickets for the much-anticipated Bangladesh-India Asian Cup Qualifiers fixture sold out within just six minutes. The price of general gallery tickets had been fixed at Tk 500.

**Read full stories on The Daily Star website*

Leicester City midfielder Hamza Choudhury is greeted with a bouqet by Bangladesh Football Federation member Imtiaz Hamiz Sabuj on his arrival in Dhaka on Monday evening ahead of a friendly against Nepal and an Asian Cup Qualifiers fixture against India. PHOTO: BFF

TWO SILVER JUBILEES LATER, decentralisation still a promise

PHOTO: BCB

SPORTS REPORTER

In less than five months, Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Aminul Islam Bulbul has led two silver jubilee celebrations -- 25th anniversary of Test status on June 26 and 25 years of the country's inaugural Test match on Monday -- and decentralization has been an important theme at both events.

The BCB celebrated the latest jubilee in the presence of several members of the historic first Test squad with a commemorative cake-cutting ceremony at a city hotel.

During the previous anniversary in June, the board had held several events across the country, including an Under-12 six-a-side tournament at divisional cities, before a concluding event in Dhaka.

This time, even though the celebrations themselves got a bit more centralised with only one conference in Dhaka, decentralisation remained a central theme.

The ceremony on Monday also marked the conclusion of the Bangladesh Cricket Conference 2025 -- a two-day event that served as the launching pad for the board's new "Connect and Grow" initiative, which brought councillors, district sports officials, district coaches, and female entrepreneurs from all districts to discuss a roadmap for decentralisation.

However, significant questions linger about how -- and whether -- the plans discussed here will ever materialise.

The push to strengthen regional structures is not new. The concept of Regional Cricket Associations was first raised in the 2000 BCB AGM, included in the board's constitution in 2017, and even given a draft framework in 2021. Yet, after 25 years of Test cricket, the idea remains stalled — and its future uncertain.

For many stakeholders in cricket, the most disappointing failure over these years is the board's inability to decentralise the sport and build a sustainable regional structure -- an issue spanning multiple administrations.

Bulbul openly acknowledged this shortcoming during the event, but while he has spoken repeatedly about establishing regional cricket since joining the board in May, his vision still appears distant. His proposal to form divisional and district teams with their own player pools remains largely theoretical under the current setup.

Advisor to the Ministry of Youth and Sports, Asif Mahmud, praised the initiative but cautioned that the real test lies in its follow-through.

After a quarter century in Test cricket, Bangladesh's struggles on the field mirrors its off the field failures and in a system where long-promised reforms repeatedly fail to translate into meaningful progress and decentralisation remains aloof, the final output is almost bound to remain poor.

Tales from a Test like no other

ASHFAQ-UL-ALAM

An average Bangladesh cricket fan is well aware of the bullet points of the Tiger's inaugural Test against India. But underneath the hard facts, are hidden stories that deserve recognition. Like fans hiding overnight in bathroom stalls in the hopes of watching history, a last-minute inclusion at the behest of the board president shining bright, a special bulletin from newsmen on a public holiday to honour a century and a debutant defying the veiled threats of the opposition captain to score a mammoth ton. These are all lesser known tales of that historic event, stories that elevate that one-sided game into a Test like no other.

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