

TIGERS UPBEAT but problems persist

By EKUSH TAPADER from Ctg

As it often happens, a victory -- especially before a major tournament -- can lift the mood within the Bangladesh team.

Yesterday was no different. There was a stark contrast between the Litton Das who spoke to the media after Bangladesh's comeback series win over Ireland in Chattogram and the one who faced reporters a week earlier, just before the three-match series began.

Smiling, relaxed, even cracking jokes, skipper Litton was understandably delighted after the Tigers sealed the series 2-1 with a dominant eight-wicket win on Tuesday, despite being thrashed in the opener.

Just days ago, Litton had entered the pre-series press conference with a stern expression and raised doubts about continuing as captain. This time, he brushed aside any uncertainty about his leadership and spoke openly about his World Cup ambitions ahead of the tournament starting next February.

But have all reasons for concern disappeared? The simple answer is: No.

Addressing the continued struggles of the middle order, which again failed to score in this series, Litton downplayed the issue, saying what "matters most now is to play well in the World Cup".

One thing appears certain: even if the



PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

middle order continues to misfire, their World Cup spots do not seem in doubt.

Bangladesh's middle-order problems are hardly new; the T20 side has looked shaky in this department for a long time. Even when runs come, they rarely influence match results. The Ireland series did little to change that outlook. Bangladesh did win the series after falling behind, and as often happens, victories tend to mask deeper issues. When results go your way, shortcomings become easier to overlook.

Beating Ireland was fully expected -- even a 3-0 win against a lower-ranked side at home would not have been cause for excessive celebration. What mattered more

was whether the gaps were addressed. For now, the team seems reluctant to confront that question.

In this series, Jaker Ali struggled in the first match and was dropped for Nurul Hasan Sohan, who performed even worse in the second game and was then omitted for the decider. Litton, however, is not overly worried: "No, brother, I'm not very concerned. I've said before -- not every department or every player will perform well every time. And look at [Tawhid] Hridoy -- he had been struggling for a big score for a while, but in this series he got one. It means every player is capable of scoring big. They just need some time."

Litton referred to Hridoy's 83 off 50 balls in the first T20I -- although most of those runs came after Bangladesh were already headed toward defeat.

Shamim Hossain, who returned for the final T20I after controversy surrounding his exclusion earlier, did not get a chance to bat. Mahidul Islam Ankon, included in the squad with hopes of testing him in one match -- preferably after Bangladesh had sealed the series -- ended up only posing with the trophy.

Ironically, Litton later said he "never really thought about trying someone new there [in the middle order]," raising questions about Ankon's selection in the first place.

Litton suggested extraordinary performances in the upcoming Bangladesh Premier League could "open doors" for players, but also noted that "you can't drop someone who's performing."

Other than Hridoy's knock in a losing cause, the middle order rarely looked settled, leaving plenty of doubts in the batting order. Gains made in bilateral series have repeatedly overshadowed the inconsistencies and fragility of the Tigers, who seem to focus more on the "winning momentum".

Going into the World Cup with a settled squad is undoubtedly positive. But if performance gaps persist, that stability could quickly become a drawback.

ALLEGATIONS OF MISCONDUCT BCB extends deadline for Jahanara inquiry

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) on Tuesday extended the deadline for submitting a report by the five-member committee tasked with investigating allegations made by former women's captain Jahanara Alam, pushing it to December 20.

Jahanara was issued a letter by the BCB on November 16, asking her to submit a formal written complaint along with any documentary or digital evidence within five working days. The board said the complainant had requested a little more time, which was granted.

"They [the investigation committee] cannot advise or proceed with the matter until they receive more detailed and proper information from her," BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury told The Daily Star on Tuesday.

Nizamuddin, however, said he was unsure whether the complainant -- currently abroad -- would submit her statement physically or virtually.

The BCB initially formed a three-member inquiry committee after allegations of misconduct involving individuals associated with the women's team surfaced in the media, and later added two legal experts to the panel. The committee was originally instructed to submit its findings and recommendations within 15 working days.



Bangladesh go down fighting against France

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh U-21 hockey team produced another brave display at the FIH Hockey Men's Junior World Cup but suffered a narrow 3-2 defeat to reigning runners-up France in their final Pool F match at the Mayor Radhakrishnan Hockey Stadium in Chennai yesterday.

Buoyed by a spirited 3-3 comeback draw against South Korea and a competitive 5-3 loss to former champions Australia, Bangladesh took the field with confidence and made France work hard despite the Europeans entering the match after big wins -- 11-1 against Korea and 8-3 against Australia.

France opened the scoring in the seventh minute through a penalty stroke converted by Tom Gaillard. Mohammad Abdullah levelled for Bangladesh in the 28th minute with a well-taken field goal.

France regained control in the third quarter, scoring twice within six minutes through Gabin Lorrzurri and James Liddiard. However, Bangladesh refused to fold. Penalty corner specialist Amirul Islam struck in the 55th minute to narrow the margin, converting the team's third short corner and his seventh goal of the competition.

Assistant coach Ashiquzzaman said the team focused on counter-attacking after keeping their defence compact but rued missed chances. "The margin could have been different had the boys capitalised on their opportunities. A penalty stroke given to us went France's way after a long review. The boys kept pushing until the last whistle," he said.

Bangladesh will now move to the 17th-24th classification round after completion of all group matches.

Saqlain's path to BPL not only paved by tape-tennis

Uncapped pace-bowling all-rounder **Abdul Gaffar Saqlain** emerged as one of the biggest surprises of the 12th Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) auction, with Rajshahi Warriors snapping him up for Tk 44 lakh -- far above his Tk 14 lakh base price. The 27-year-old, who bypassed traditional age-level pathways, recently gained attention with a strong showing at the Rising Stars Asia Cup in Qatar. In an interview with *The Daily Star's* Samsul Arefin Khan, Saqlain discussed his unconventional cricketing journey and development into a multi-format player after starting in tape-tennis cricket. The following are excerpts:

The Daily Star (DS): How excited are you to be picked for the BPL for the first time?

Abdul Gaffar Saqlain (AGS): For any new player, getting a chance in such a big tournament feels amazing.

DS: How did your family react?

AGS: I was outside when the auction started. When I returned, it was already underway. My mother, younger brother, and aunts were watching from home. My brother became very excited when my name came up, and my mother -- who was reciting the Quran after Maghrib as usual -- was very happy when Rajshahi picked me.

DS: After strong performances in the Rising Stars Asia Cup and domestic cricket, how confident were you about getting a BPL team?

AGS: Wherever I play, I just try to give my best. I managed to do that this year -- but ultimately, Allah made it happen.

DS: You didn't come through traditional age-group cricket. What was your journey like?

AGS: I never played U-16, U-17, U-18, or U-19. I started playing in my locality. An elder brother once told me I had talent and should try cricket-ball cricket. At Saidpur, I performed well in a tournament at the Railway Ground, then played a



year in Third Division. I spent two years at Gazi Tyres, moved to Kakrail Boys in First Division, then returned to Gazi Tyres. We earned promotion to First Division and became champions to qualify for the Premier League. That same year, I was called up for the National League -- even before my premier league debut. My first premier

league wicket was Tamim Iqbal, which I'll never forget.

DS: Many say the HP Programme changed your career. What did that opportunity mean?

AGS: I always wanted to attend a camp, so getting into the HP camp made me extremely happy. HP helps with screening, fitness, mentality, strength, and discipline. I loved the environment and tried to learn as much as possible.

DS: You have a long history in tape-tennis cricket. How did it shape your journey?

AGS: People think I reached the BPL only because of tape-tennis, but that's not true. I played tape-tennis, but also club cricket. I played two years each in Third and Second Division, and seven to eight years in club cricket overall. Before league season, I would stop tape-tennis and prepare for two months. My performances in club cricket earned me promotions throughout my career.

DS: After playing abroad in the Rising Stars Asia Cup and now getting a BPL call-up, what's your vision?

AGS: Like any player, I dream of representing my country. I want to serve Bangladesh for a long time, and I pray that Allah helps me achieve that.



Narrow defeat despite MARIA'S WONDER STRIKE

Bangladesh players leave the pitch dejected following a narrow 2-1 defeat against Azerbaijan in the last match of the Infix Tri-Nation Tournament at the National Stadium in Dhaka yesterday. The women in red put up a much improved performance compared to their 1-0 defeat against Malaysia, fighting back from a goal down through a superlative volley from Maria Manda in the first half. However, the European side, ranked 30 places above Bangladesh, struck again late, eventually sealing victory and clinching the title of the three-nation tournament.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

SHORT CORNER

Amite's 213 drives Sylhet, Chattogram thump Rangpur



Amite Hasan drove Sylhet to a massive total with a career-best 213 in Sylhet on the third day of the sixth round of the National Cricket League match against Rajshahi. Sylhet declared at 535 for 8, while Rajshahi fought back in their second

innings and ended the day at 146 for 3, trailing by 153 runs. Meanwhile, Chattogram defeated table-toppers Rangpur by an innings and 43 runs in Cox's Bazar.

Mohammedan salvage draw, Police snatch narrow win

Mohammedan came from behind to secure a 1-1 draw against Fortis FC, while Bangladesh Police edged Arambagh KS 1-0 in the Federation Cup Group B matches yesterday. With two matches played, Mohammedan top the table with four points, and Police sit second with three points.

Former England batter Robin Smith dies aged 62

Former England batter Robin Smith died at the age of 62, English county side Hampshire announced on Tuesday. Smith, who played 62 Tests between 1988 and 1996, died unexpectedly on Monday in Australia.

44 clubs stand firm, vow to continue boycott

Forty-four clubs have reaffirmed their stance to continue protests against the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), alleging irregularities in the recent board elections, and will maintain their boycott of domestic leagues. Despite BCB president Aminul Islam Bulbul's announcement that the First Division League would begin on December 11, the clubs have refused to withdraw their boycott decision.

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