

### WOMEN'S ASIAN CUP

## Lessons pile up in build-up

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh began their preparations for next year's AFC Women's Asian Cup in late September and have since played four international friendlies against higher-ranked opponents Thailand, Malaysia and Azerbaijan, but the women in red and green lost all matches.

With their maiden appearance at the top-tier Asian Cup drawing closer, these games were designed less for results and more to assess resilience, structure and tactical progress against stronger and closely ranked sides.

British coach Peter Butler has used the window to test his full squad and maximise game-time, keeping in mind the quality of China, North Korea and Uzbekistan – their group-stage opponents in Australia.

Bangladesh's first two outings, back-to-back losses at Thailand in October and November (1-0 and 2-1), exposed shortcomings in execution and cohesion. However, their performances in the recent Tri-Nation Series at home showed clear contrast.

The 1-0 defeat to Malaysia – ranked 12 places above Bangladesh – was particularly frustrating. Bangladesh dominated possession and attacked effectively through the flanks, but they lacked composure in the final third.

**Coach Peter Butler has used the window to test his full squad and maximise game-time, keeping in mind the quality of opponents in Australia early next year.**

Their high defensive line repeatedly left them exposed, and the decisive goal came from a counterattack that exploited this flaw. The match revealed potential in midfield and attack but highlighted shortcomings in defensive transitions and finishing.

In comparison, the 2-1 loss to European side Azerbaijan was arguably Bangladesh's most encouraging display of the series. Facing opponents superior technically, tactically and physically, the team showed maturity and resilience absent in the Malaysia match.

After conceding early, they did not unravel against a side ranked in the top 75; instead, they responded through a superb left-footed volley from Maria Manda, finishing a well-rehearsed set-piece delivered by Sopna Rani.

Although Azerbaijan secured a late winner, the contest remained balanced for long stretches.

Overall, the matches reaffirmed that while Bangladesh possess pace, heart and individual talent, they need significant improvements in technique, physical conditioning, defensive cohesion and clinical finishing to close the gap with stronger sides.

Over the next three months, Butler would aim to refine these areas through further international exposure and targeted work on recurring defensive lapses.

*England's unyielding faith in Bazball will be tested under the floodlights at the Gabba from Thursday as Ben Stokes's side confront their pink-ball frailties and the prospect of falling 2-0 behind in the Ashes. After surrendering a dominant position in their eight-wicket defeat in Perth, England need at least a draw in the second Test in Brisbane to keep their hopes alive in the five-match series.*



## ENGLAND BATTLE HISTORY and pink-ball woes

All day-night Tests, which use a pink ball, have produced a result, and England's record under lights offers little reassurance. They have lost five of their seven pink-ball matches, including all three against Australia.

No England side has come back from 1-0 down to win the Ashes in Australia since the 1950s, and none have won a Test at the Gabba since Mike Gatting's team in 1986.

Australia, by contrast, dominate the day-night format with 13 wins in 14 Tests.



Their only pink-ball defeat came at the Gabba in 2024, against the West Indies.

Stand-in skipper Steve Smith said regular captain Pat Cummins may still feature despite being left out of last week's squad due to a back injury.

Mitchell Starc, already the most prolific bowler in day-night Tests with 81 wickets at an average of 17.08, needs three more dismissals to surpass Wasim Akram's 414 and become the most successful left-arm fast bowler in Test history.

# Amite strikes balance between aggression and caution

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Amite Hasan had already acquired the trait of perseverance, evidenced by the bulk of runs he has scored across various domestic tournaments, and in the ongoing National Cricket League (NCL), the Sylhet Division batter is putting in a conscious effort to balance his game by adding an attacking dimension.

Yesterday, his side defeated Rajshahi Division by 10 wickets in Sylhet on the fourth day, and the highlight of the match was his brilliant 213 off 251 balls knock in the first innings.

Amite batted for six hours across the second and third day to reach his second first-class double hundred off 221 deliveries, and for the second time in his red-ball career he got out on 213.

The sparkling innings contained 28 fours and a six, still, the 24-year-old felt he had left a few runs on the pitch.

"When I got out, I felt like I could have score 40-50 runs more," he replied with a smile when asked about how he felt after getting dismissed.

Amite hit fluent drives and backfoot punches on a true wicket at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium, showcasing a mix of attack

and defence and the adoption of a new modus operandi.

He is a proven performer in domestic red-ball cricket. His numbers attest to his credibility, having finished NCL 2024 and BCL 2024 as the highest and second highest run-getter respectively.

**"Every player dreams of playing for the national team and I am no different. Since I am playing in the NCL, that's where I'm mainly focusing right now."**

Amite Hasan

But while in the past he scored his runs at a snail's pace, in the ongoing NCL his strike rate is nearing 80, considerably higher from his career first-class strike rate of 50.26 – signaling a deliberate change in mindset.

"I don't play like this all the time," Amite divulged on his run-scoring process in the ongoing NCL. "In this match, in fact, throughout this tournament, I have been playing this way.



"I spoke to Rajin Saleh sir [Sylhet coach] and he asked me not to defend too much or attack too much. He wanted me to play very natural cricket and play according to the merit of the ball. I felt this approach is very helpful since it's creating pressure on the bowlers," he added.

In the Rajshahi match, Amite had to contend with the country's fastest quick, Nahid Rana, who bowled 23.4 overs in the innings in challenging winter conditions.

"He [Rana] naturally bowls very quick and he has a very good bouncer. My plan was that when he was going for bouncers, I won't take up the challenge and leave the deliveries alone. The plan was that if he bowled anything wayward, I will take him on."

Amite is yet to break into the national side and was left unsold in the recent players' auction of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL). However, the wicketkeeper-batter claimed to be unbothered by it all.

"Every player dreams of playing for the national team and I am no different. Since I am playing in the NCL, that's where I'm mainly focusing right now. There is no regret [about BPL], it's my fate. It's a call from the team owners and it's very much their decision," he said.

*\*\*Read full stories on The Daily Star's website*

### SHORT CORNER

#### NCL: Six teams in title race

The title race in the 27th National Cricket League (NCL) will go down to the final round, with the top six teams remaining in contention after the conclusion of the sixth round yesterday.

#### BFF 'earned' Tk 4 crore from ticket sales

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) generated Tk 4.05 crore from ticket sales for their three home matches in the AFC Asian Cup Qualifiers against Singapore, Hong Kong and India, a BFF official claimed on Wednesday. However, the game's local governing body did not disclose the expenditure for those matches.

#### Pandya returns for SA T20s

All-rounder Hardik Pandya, out since September with injury, has returned to the India squad for this month's T20I series against South Africa, while Shubman Gill will have to pass a fitness test to play, BCCI said on Wednesday.

#### Five-wicket Duffy puts NZ on top against Windies

A five-wicket haul by Jacob Duffy gave New Zealand a 64-run first-innings lead over the West Indies with the tourists all out for 167 in the first Test on Wednesday. At stumps on day two in Christchurch, New Zealand were 32-0 in their second innings to be 96 ahead.

#### India's toss-losing streak continues

India's unusual streak of bad luck at the toss showed no signs of ending. With South Africa captain Temba Bavuma choosing to bowl first in the second ODI in Raipur on Wednesday, India have now gone 20 consecutive ODIs without winning a toss – the longest such run in men's international cricket.

## 'Incredible' Haaland fastest PL centurion

Erling Haaland made history as the Manchester City striker became the fastest player to reach 100 Premier League goals in a remarkable 5-4 win against Fulham on Tuesday. Haaland's clinical finish in the first half at Craven Cottage took him to his century in just 111 league appearances for City. He shattered the previous record set by former Newcastle and Blackburn star Alan Shearer, who took 124 matches to reach 100 goals. "It's incredible, impressive. He was outstanding, today he was unbelievable," City boss Pep Guardiola said of Haaland.



PHOTO: MANCHESTER CITY

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