Star SPORT
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"It's (title race) not over. Who said that? We didn't lose. We will continue. Nine points is a lot against Arsenal but it happened. We have the game at home (vs Arsenal) so we have to try until the end. When it's not possible then we congratulate the champion but we have to try."

Man City manager **Pep Guardiola** after his side lost points in a 1-1 draw at West Ham

WOMEN'S ASIAN CUP

Japan complete semis line-up

AFP, *Sydney*

Ruthless Japan crushed the Philippines 7-0 on Sunday to book a Women's Asian Cup semi-final with South Korea and close in on a third continental title.

The dominant victory at Stadium Australia in Sydney also ensured they will be at a 10th consecutive World Cup in Brazil next year.

Currently ranked eight, the highest at the Asian Cup, they were a class above with two goals in three minutes late in the first half opening the floodgates.

Tottenham defender Toko Koga collected a brace with Mina Tanaka, Remina Chiba, Manaka Matsukubo, Momoko Tanikawa and Riko Ueki also on target in another warning shot to their title challengers.

Japan have blasted a tournament-high 24 goals and conceded none.

It set up a last-four clash in Sydney on Wednesday against an equally ominous-looking South Korea, who crushed Uzbekistan 6-0 to progress. Hosts Australia face defending champions China in the other semi-final in Perth on Tuesday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Bangladesh pacer Taskin Ahmed celebrates after bowling a ripper that breached the defence of Pakistan batter Mohammad Rizwan during the third ODI of the three-match series at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium yesterday. After Tanzid Tamim's 107 powered Bangladesh to 290-5, the Tigers' pacers ripped through Pakistan's top order. Taskin struck twice inside the first three overs, removing Sahibzada Farhan (6) and Rizwan (4), while Nahid Rana nicked off opener Maaz Sadaqat (6) as Pakistan slumped to 17-3. Rana later dismissed Ghazi Ghori (29) after the Powerplay, and Mustafizur Rahman had Abdul Samad (34) caught behind to leave the visitors reeling at 82-5 in 17.4 overs. A 79-run stand between Salman Agha and Saad Masood briefly halted the slide before Mustafizur returned to castle Masood (38) in the 32nd over, reducing Pakistan to 161-6 in 31.2 overs.

'Finalissima' cancelled

AFP, *BARCELONA*

The 'Finalissima' clash between Euro 2024 winners Spain and world champions Argentina set to take place on March 27 in Qatar has been cancelled, UEFA said on Sunday.

The European football governing body said in a statement that it was "not possible to reach agreement with Argentina" over an alternative date and location, required because of the Middle East war affecting the region.

"It is a source of great disappointment to UEFA and the organisers that circumstances and timing have denied the teams of the chance to compete for this prestigious prize in Qatar," said UEFA in a statement.

The Finalissima pits the latest Copa America winners against the European championship winners, with Argentina winning the inaugural edition by beating Italy in 2022 at Wembley in London.

Argentina captain Lionel Messi lifted the World Cup with his country in Qatar later that year.

UEFA said they had investigated several alternative options to playing in Qatar "but each ultimately proved unacceptable to the Argentinian Football Association".

The first option was to play at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid, which Argentina rejected.

UEFA then suggested a two-legged event, with the first match in the Spanish capital on March 27 and a second leg in Buenos Aires at some point before the 2028 Euros and Copa America, which was also turned down.

They then proposed playing a one-off match at another neutral venue in Europe on March 27 or March 30 but Argentina said they were only available on March 31.

Tanzid dispels personal demons in first ODI ton

SPORTS REPORTER

A six over long off saw Tanzid Hasan Tamim reach the magic number, his first-ever ODI ton in his 31st appearance, and the look on his face said it all.

As the ball sailed over the fence, he celebrated with outstretched hands, relieved over finally making a start count, and that too in a crucial series-deciding third ODI against Pakistan yesterday at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium.

The 23-year-old has been under the scanner for almost his entire ODI career. Debuting in August 2023 in the Asia Cup, Tanzid's first few innings did not merit a chance at that year's ICC ODI World Cup but when Tamim Iqbal stepped aside, his stars aligned.

That World Cup turned into a baptism of fire for the youngster, who played all nine games, but contributed just 145 runs at an average of 16.11 with one fifty.

His talent was evident, but so was his inconsistency. A few flashy boundaries and a lapse of concentration resulting in dismissal -- that's how most of his knocks panned out.

There are also signs that he is more suited to the T20 format. In 45 T20Is, Tanzid has 11 fifties and quite a few times he helped the team get off to a flying start.

Yet, in ODIs, questions of temperament remained. He had five fifties before yesterday, and had never delivered a big score that set the tempo, especially when his team batted first.

Ahead of the Pakistan series, a 92 in the Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) and a ton in the practice match saw him make the playing XI in the first ODI, where he hit a rapid 67.

However, that knock did little to dispel the doubts as it came in a paltry chase of 115. Tanzid did not help his case when he got out cheaply in the second ODI, chasing Pakistan's 274.

In the series-deciding third ODI, Tanzid showed his flair and sustained it long enough to reach a career milestone.

A confident flick off Haris Rauf got him off the mark in the second over. In that very over, he dispatched Rauf for an effortless six over deep mid-wicket to set the tone.

Bangladesh moved smoothly with Tanzid scoring the bulk of the runs in a 105-run opening stand with Saif Hassan. A 53-run stand with Najmul Hossain Shanto followed, yet there was always the fear that Tanzid might lose his concentration.

After reaching his 80s, Tanzid bunkered down a bit and played risk-free shots to close in on the ton. However, after reaching 94, his natural instincts took over, as he lofted Salman Agha for a six to get his first international ton.

His innings ended on a run-a-ball 107 and it has handed Tanzid the blueprint on how to go about scoring tons in ODIs.

Proteas thrash Kiwis

AFP, *Mount Maunganui*

A new-look South Africa scythed through New Zealand's batting lineup to comfortably win Sunday's first T20I by seven wickets, with 20 balls to spare.

The visitors' seam attack proved unplayable early on as World Cup finalists New Zealand were reduced to 36-5 before being dismissed for 91 in the 15th over, their 10th lowest total in T20Is.

South Africa eased to 93-3 in response, with opener Connor Esterhuizen's unbeaten 45 off 48 balls ensuring they would claim early honours in the five-match series.

The 24-year-old was one of four South African players making their international debut in any format, alongside Rubin Hermann, Dian Forrester and Nqobani Mokoena.

Teenage pace bowler Mokoena impressed with the ball, exploiting unpredictable bounce at Mount Maunganui's Bay Oval to take 3-26 off 3.3 overs.

The 19-year-old ripped through New Zealand's tail to ensure they didn't push their total past 100.

"It was quite cool making my debut. I just went out there and enjoyed it," Mokoena, 19, said.

"The whole team was backing me and I was quite excited for it.

"I just stuck to my plans and thank God it came off."

87 DAYS TO GO

Conen's record before Pele

Germany's Edmund Conen completed a hattrick by scoring in the 66th, 70th and 87th minutes against Belgium at the 1934 World Cup. He was only 19 years, 198 days old at the time. His record as the youngest player to score a World Cup hattrick stood for 24 years. It was broken at the 1958 World Cup when Brazil legend Pele netted a hattrick against France at the age of 17 years and 244 days.

***** Visit The Daily Star's website to also read: 'From traffic signals to the World Cup'***

Zico ignored as Ishaque gets first call-up

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh coach Javier Cabrera has included inexperienced goalkeeper Ishaque Ali Akondo in the 28-member preliminary squad for the upcoming two international matches, overlooking experienced custodian Anisur Rahman Zico.

Bangladesh will play a FIFA friendly against Vietnam on March 26 as part of preparation for the away AFC Asian Cup qualifying match against Singapore on March 31.

Among the 28 players named, Brothers Union goalkeeper Akondo is the only fresh inclusion. The 41-year-old coach has dropped England-based midfielder Cuba Mitchell defenders Taj Uddin and Topu Barman, and forward Rakib Hossain from the squad that faced India in Dhaka last November. The latter two are unavailable due to suspension.

Akondo, who previously represented the Bangladesh U-20 team in AFC competitions, expressed satisfaction after receiving his maiden national team call-up and vowed to fight for a place in the final 23-member squad. The Sirajganj-born keeper kept three clean sheets in nine Bangladesh Football League matches, conceding 11 goals.

PRELIMINARY SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Mitul Marma, Sujan Hossain, Mehedi Hasan Srabon, Ishaque Akondo
Defenders: Tariq Raihan Kazi, Rahmat Mia, Shakil Ahad Topu, Abdullah Omar, Shakil Hossain, Zayyan Ahmed, Bishwanath Ghosh, Saad Uddin, Monjurur Rahman Manik, Isa Faysal.
Midfielders: Shah Quazem Kirmane, Sheikh Morsalin, Jamal Bhuyan, Sohel Rana, Md Sohel Rana, Mohammad Ridoy, Shamit Shome
Forwards: Arman Foysal Akash, Emon Shahriar, Faisal Ahmed Fahim, Fahamedul Islam, Mirajul Islam Rafiqul Islam, Sumon Reza.

"I will try my best to secure a place in the final 23-member squad, although it will be a challenge to compete with the other goalkeepers -- Mitul Marma, Mehedi Hasan Srabon and Sujon Hossain," Akondo said in a video message shared by the Bangladesh Football Federation.

Mitul and Sujon have been regular starters for their respective clubs, Abahani and Mohammedan. Mitul has conceded 11 goals and kept five clean sheets in 11 league matches, while Sujon has kept two clean sheets in nine appearances, conceding 11 goals.

Srabon has featured in only one league match, conceding once, as experienced Zico has been preferred ahead of him at Bashundhara Kings. Zico kept four clean sheets in 10 matches, conceding 12 goals.

There were strong speculations within the football fraternity that Zico would return to the preliminary squad after missing the last nine internationals over a 15-month period, however, he was once again overlooked by the Spanish coach.

Apart from the four goalkeepers, Cabrera has recalled fit-again defenders Bishwanath Ghosh, Monjurur Rahman Manik and Isa Faysal, along with young striker Mirajul Islam, experienced winger Rafiqul Islam, and forwards Sumon Reza and Fahamedul Islam, who missed the India match due to suspension.

Meanwhile, Leicester City midfielder Hamza Choudhury, who was not named in the 28, is set to join the team in Vietnam on March 22.

YOUNGEST PL SCORERS

Max Dowman (Ars) - 16 years 73 days
James Vaughan (Eve) - 16 years 270 days
James Milner (Leeds) - 16 years 356 days
Wayne Rooney (Eve) - 16 years 360 days
Rio Ngumoha (Liv) - 16 years 361 days

Dowman PL's youngest scorer

English midfielder Max Dowman became the youngest-ever goalscorer in the Premier League as the 16-year-old inspired Arsenal's late surge to beat Everton 2-0 on Saturday and close in on a first Premier League title for 22 years. Arsenal then rested easy as Manchester City faltered again, dropping points in a 1-1 draw at relegation-threatened West Ham United. The Gunners have 70 points after 31 games, nine ahead of City, who have a game in hand.

PHOTO: ARSENAL