

New selectors steer clear of 'chop-and-change' approach

SPORTS REPORTER

The newly formed four-member national selection panel yesterday named a 15-member Bangladesh squad for the opening two ODIs of the upcoming three-match series against New Zealand, starting on April 17, opting for continuity by retaining an unchanged side from the previous Pakistan series.

The panel, which took charge earlier this month, had 10 days to pick their first squad and chose to stick with the same group that secured a 2-1 series win over Pakistan at home in March, seemingly playing it safe at the start of their tenure by going with the safest option.

During that series, Bangladesh fielded the same playing XI in all three matches, leaving Soumya Sarkar, Mahidul Islam Ankon, Tanvir Islam and Shoriful Islam without a game.

While selectors in the past have often dropped players without giving them sufficient opportunities, the new panel appears keen to move away from that trend.

"When we reviewed the team, we felt the last series was successful. Bangladesh played good cricket, and some players didn't get the chance to be in the playing XI," said Habibul Bashar, chairman of the national selection panel, during a press conference to announce the squad while

BANGLADESH SQUAD

Mehidy Hasan Miraz (c), Soumya Sarkar, Saif Hassan, Tanzid Hasan Tamim, Najmul Hossain Shanto (vc), Tawhid Hridoy, Litton Das, Afif Hossain, Mahidul Islam Ankon, Rishad Hossain, Tanvir Islam, Mustafizur Rahman, Taskin Ahmed, Shoriful Islam and Nahid Rana.



"Giving someone just three matches are not enough. We want to give him [Saif] more opportunities before making a decision. We don't want to get into a chop-and-change approach."

Habibul Bashar,
head of national selection panel

sitting alongside the other three selectors – Hasibul Hossain Shanto, Naeem Islam and Nadif Chowdhury.

"We want to believe in continuity, which is why we didn't change the team for this series," he added.

There are some questions over the form of top-order batters Saif Hassan and Najmul Hossain Shanto. Saif, who made his ODI debut last year largely on the back

of his T20 performances, has managed just one half-century in nine innings while Shanto is without a fifty in his last 12 ODI innings.

"Giving someone just three matches are not enough. We want to give him [Saif] more opportunities before making a decision. We don't want to get into a chop-and-change approach.

"Shanto is one of our quality batters.

Yes, he is not in great touch, but we hope he will deliver better performances," Bashar said.

Litton Das was moved to the middle order during the Pakistan series and scored 41 each in the second and third ODI. Prior to that, he had endured a lean run, failing to reach double figures in nine innings, including four ducks.

Bashar confirmed that Litton is currently being considered for the No.4 position, although a return to the top order remains a possibility.

"After Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad, we needed experience there [in middle-order]. For now, we are considering him [Litton] in that role. We will see what happens in the future," he said.

Another notable talking point was Soumya, who despite being the highest run-scorer in the West Indies series with 140 runs in three innings, including a match-winning 91 in the decider, did not feature in the playing XI against Pakistan.

Bashar, however, remains optimistic about Soumya's role going forward, calling him an "important asset" for the team.

The former Bangladesh captain also reiterated the panel's stance to avoid frequent changes to the squad as they also keep an eye on direct qualification to the 2027 ICC World Cup.

Shakib's return conditional, says chief selector

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) chief selector Habibul Bashar Sumon said veteran all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan remains in contention for national selection, but only if key conditions are met.

"The board has unanimously agreed that based on Shakib's availability, fitness and accessibility, and his ability to be present at match venues, we will certainly consider him for future selection," Bashar told reporters in Mirpur yesterday.

"He is currently in a place where cricket isn't played regularly, so while fitness can be maintained, competitive match practice is limited," he added.

In a recent interview with The Daily Star, Shakib said his motivation to play at the highest level remains strong and that he wants to return home to play before eventually moving back into politics.

Since the fall of the Awami League government in August 2024, Shakib – who served as a Member of Parliament for that administration – has been unable to return to Bangladesh, although he went on to feature in four away Tests. A home farewell series against South Africa in October 2024 did not materialise due to a lack of government clearance.

Despite the uncertainty and long absence, Bashar indicated the selectors are willing to plan long-term around the 39-year-old if conditions align.

"If everything is in order, we want him for a long period," he said.



Kings, Fortis maintain title charge

SPORTS REPORTER

Bashundhara Kings and Fortis FC maintained their title push in the Bangladesh Football League with important wins on Saturday. Fortis defeated Bangladesh Police 2-0 at the Shaheed Barkat Stadium in Gazipur, with Mithu Chowdhury opening the scoring early and Piash Nova sealing the win in stoppage time. Goalkeeper Sujan Perera also played a key role with crucial saves. The result lifted Fortis to second place with 24 points from 12 matches, three behind leaders Bashundhara Kings and two ahead of Abahani, while Police remained fifth with 16 points.

At the Kings Arena, Bashundhara edged bottom side Arambagh 2-1 to stay top of the table. Dorielton Gomes scored and assisted Sunday Emmanuel to give Kings a two-goal lead before Shadrach Mills pulled one back. Kings held on to register their eighth win, while Arambagh suffered their seventh defeat of the campaign.



PHOTO: BFF



The traditional wrestling event Boli Khela was held at Ching Hla Mong Chowdhury Mari Stadium in Rangamati yesterday as part of the indigenous communities' new year celebrations -- Biju, Sangrai, Baisu, Bishu, Changkran, Changlan, Pata and Bihu. While the famed Jabbarer Boli Khela takes place annually in Chattogram, Rangamati also upholds the tradition every year during this time in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Rangamati's Dipu Dewan emerged as champion in this year's competition.

PHOTO: RIKORS CHAKMA

Ancelotti offers Neymar World Cup lifeline

STAR SPORTS DESK

Will Neymar don Brazil's iconic blue and yellow at the 2026 FIFA World Cup?

That question has been on the minds of fans of the five-time world champions as the tournament, set to begin on June 11 across the USA, Mexico, and Canada, draws closer.

Until recently, there was little reason for optimism among Neymar supporters. But in an interview with L'Equipe, Brazil coach Carlo Ancelotti has reopened the door, suggesting the forward still has two months to prove he deserves a place in his 26-man squad.

Although Ancelotti has consistently maintained that Neymar would be considered if fully fit, the attacker was left out of Brazil's squad for last month's warm-up matches against France and Croatia – which were Brazil's last international matches before the squad announcement.

Brazil's all-time leading scorer with 79 goals, Neymar has not featured for the national team since suffering a serious knee injury in October 2023. Since returning to Santos FC last year, he has struggled to put together a consistent run of matches – factors that have cast doubt over his chances of appearing at a fourth World Cup.



"He's [Neymar] being evaluated by the CBF and by me, and he still has two months to show he has the qualities to play in the next World Cup."

Carlo Ancelotti,
Brazil head coach

However, Brazil's 2-1 defeat to France in Boston saw fans once again chant Neymar's name. At the time, Ancelotti played down the reaction, insisting the focus should remain on the selected players.

Now, though, the Italian has indicated

that the Santos forward remains in his plans as Brazil weigh their options ahead of the World Cup.

"He's a great talent, and it's normal that people think he can help us win the next World Cup," Ancelotti said.

"He's being evaluated by the CBF and by me, and he still has two months to show he has the qualities to play in the next World Cup.

"After his knee injury, Neymar has made a good comeback; he's scoring goals. He needs to continue in this direction and improve his fitness. He's on the right track."

Injury concerns have limited Neymar to just six appearances in Santos's 20 matches across all competitions this season. While his return of three goals and three assists remains respectable, questions persist over whether he can be the answer for Brazil as they chase a sixth World Cup title after a 24-year wait.

The pressure on Ancelotti is significant. Failure in North America would leave Brazil with their longest World Cup title drought, surpassing the gap between their 1970 and 1994 triumphs.

For now, Neymar's place on football's biggest stage remains uncertain. But Ancelotti's words have at least given fans renewed hope that the 34-year-old can make his case as time continues to tick.



ARSENAL STUMBLE IN TITLE RACE

Bournemouth's Alex Scott celebrates after scoring the 74th-minute winner in a 2-1 victory over Premier League leaders Arsenal at the Emirates yesterday, dealing a major blow to the Gunners' hopes of ending their 22-year title wait. Midfielder Scott produced a cool finish after a neat build-up to stun the nervous-looking hosts and provide a huge boost for chasers Manchester City. The defeat left a labouring Arsenal still with a seemingly commanding nine-point lead over City, but Pep Guardiola's side have played two games fewer and can close the gap if they beat Chelsea today.

PHOTO: REUTERS

60 DAYS TO GO



A long wait that ended in 1990

It took 60 years for a team to keep a clean sheet in a World Cup final. The feat was first achieved by West Germany at the 1990 tournament in Italy, when they defeated Diego Maradona's Argentina 1-0 in the final.

** Visit The Daily Star's Website to also read: 'The day Owen won in defeat'.