

## Pace battery building momentum, bringing success

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI from Chattogram

Raw pace, guile, perseverance and skill – Bangladesh's pace unit's rise has seen them catch up to all those traits in the recent past and, with a series on the line against a depleted New Zealand, Tigers' fast bowlers turned things up a notch to turn things around, handing skipper Mehidy Hasan Miraz his third straight series win.

"Our pace unit is bowling really well and not just now but over the last three-four years," Miraz said after his side sealed the

**"It was very hot, and I guess people probably don't necessarily see on TV the conditions we were faced with. It was really hot – probably one of my hottest experiences playing in these conditions."**

New Zealand stand in skipper Tom Latham

**"They [Shanto and Litton] worked really hard at the crease. Given the conditions and the heat, the way they batted and took responsibility was certainly very good."**

Bangladesh ODI captain Mehidy Hasan Miraz



PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

ODI series against New Zealand 2-1 with a 55-run win in the third ODI at Chattogram yesterday.

Nahid Rana set the series on fire with a five-wicket haul in the second ODI at Mirpur to pave the way for a comeback, while Mustafizur Rahman once again showed his guile in his first game this series, picking up a five-for as Tigers' pace attack continued its upsurge.

At home or away, including the recent Pakistan series, the pace unit has delivered consistently – certainly a luxury for any Bangladesh skipper. It also means competition. Someone like Shoriful Islam played all three matches series after a one-and-a-half-year gap from 50-over format, and that was only possible as Mustafizur had discomfort right before the toss in the

series opener.

"We went to South Africa [2022] and beat them there because of the pace unit. A pace unit which is doing well changes momentum of a team," added the Bangladesh skipper.

Shoriful had been hitting great lengths and picking up five wickets. "It's difficult for a player to play a format suddenly... but the way he adjusted and was a consistent performer in all three matches... I think if everyone has that hunger, it will be great for the team," Miraz said on the left-arm quick.

Mustafizur, meanwhile, picked up his sixth career five-for, a feat that saw him

● Bangladesh's 55-run win over New Zealand in Chattogram is their biggest victory by runs against the Black Caps in ODIs. Their previous highest was a 43-run win in Mirpur in 2013.

● Left-arm pacer Mustafizur Rahman claimed his sixth five-wicket haul in ODIs. He now stands joint-second among left-arm pacers alongside Wasim Akram and Trent Boult. Mitchell Starc leads this category with nine, while Waqar Younis holds the overall ODI record with 13 five-wicket hauls.

● The 2-1 series win over New Zealand marks Bangladesh's third consecutive ODI series victory, following home wins against Pakistan and West Indies.

match the great Wasim Akram and Trent Boult.

Rana was the superstar this series. He turned things around in the Mirpur cauldron on a spectacularly hot day, bowling consistently at speeds over 140 kph. He became a weapon, a massive threat for any oppositions, picking up seven wickets in the series. "Rana is an asset for the country and we all must try to take care of him," Miraz said.

New Zealand skipper Tom Latham concurred with Miraz's assessment of Rana. "I think someone who's able to run in and bowl 145-150 on a reasonably slow surface certainly shows the skill set that he has and the X-factor that he has... he's obviously a star in the making for Bangladesh," he said.



**A SPIRITED START...** Bangladesh captain Orpita Pal receives the player-of-the-match award after her hat-trick powered a spirited 5-5 draw against Chinese Taipei in the Women's Asian Games Qualifiers in Jakarta yesterday, marking the senior team's international debut on a positive note. Bangladesh had surged to a 3-1 lead before trailing by two goals, only to fight back in a high-scoring contest. "As a new team, we were committed to give a fight... we could not win, but we have drawn the match," Orpita said, adding that the award "was not possible without my teammates' tremendous support". Bangladesh will next face Uzbekistan today.

PHOTO: AHF



### Concussion sub Amite steps up

East Zone's Amite Hasan strengthened his claim for a maiden national call-up ahead of next month's two-match Test series at home against Pakistan with a commanding display in the Bangladesh Cricket League in Sylhet yesterday. The 24-year-old, playing as a concussion substitute for Jaker Ali, resumed on 88 and went on to hit a superb 162 off 265 balls – his 11th first-class century. Backed by Mushfiqur Rahim's 83 and Yasir Ali's unbeaten 79, East Zone amassed a 463-run first-innings total, securing a 156-run lead. Central Zone were left reeling at 82 for seven in their second innings, still trailing by 74 runs at stumps on day three, with East Zone firmly in control and closing in on victory. In the other match, North Zone secured a dominant 10-wicket win over South Zone inside three days.

PHOTO: BCB



A significant slice of flair is under threat ahead of the 2026 FIFA World Cup, with Spain's Lamine Yamal and Brazil's Estevao Willian facing injury concerns, while Germany winger Serge Gnabry has already been ruled out. Yamal picked up a hamstring injury after scoring the winner in Barcelona's 1-0 win over Celta Vigo in the LaLiga yesterday. The 18-year-old will miss the rest of the season, the club confirmed, but is expected to recover in time for the World Cup. Estevao, however, is reportedly "highly unlikely" to be fit for the start of the mega event after suffering a Grade 4 hamstring injury during Chelsea loss to Manchester United last Sunday. Gnabry, meanwhile, will miss the World Cup entirely after confirming a thigh (adductor) injury, bringing an early end to his season with Bayern Munich.

PHOTO: AFP



### When goal-line tech settled the debate

The first-ever goal awarded using goal-line technology in a FIFA World Cup came in the 2014 edition. The incident occurred in the 48th minute of a Group E match between France and Honduras in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Although France's Karim Benzema's shot initially struck the post, the "GoalControl-4D" system accurately detected that Honduras goalkeeper Noel Valladares had inadvertently pushed the ball over the goal line.

\*\* Visit The Daily Star's website to also read: 'The kiss before the fall.'

## Italy twist fuels debate over Iran's World Cup spot

AGENCIES

Will Iran finally play the upcoming FIFA World Cup? This has emerged as one of the more pressing questions in international football in recent times, following US and Israeli military strikes earlier this year.

The prospect of Iran being replaced at the "greatest show on earth" has stirred a mix of disbelief and indifference across Italy, after a suggestion by a US envoy reignited debate over the intersection of politics and sport.

According to the Financial Times, Paolo Zampolli, a special envoy to Donald Trump, proposed that four-time champions Italy should take Iran's place at the upcoming tournament. He argued that Italy's pedigree justified inclusion, despite their failure to qualify.

The proposal was swiftly dismissed in Rome. Sports Minister Andrea Abodi described it as "impossible" and "inappropriate," while Finance Minister Giancarlo Giorgetti called it "shameful." Veteran coach Gianni De Biasi added that any vacancy would logically go to another qualified side, not one eliminated in the playoffs.

At the centre of the issue is Iran's confirmed place in the tournament.



FIFA President Gianni Infantino has made it clear that Iran will participate, reiterating that the game should remain separate from political disputes.

Still, political overtones persist. Trump himself said the Iranian team would be "welcome" but questioned whether it would be "appropriate" for them to attend, citing concerns for their "life and safety." The remarks have added to an already sensitive backdrop shaped by ongoing geopolitical tensions.

Iran, however, appears to be proceeding as planned. The World Cup, which is also being co-hosted by Mexico and Canada, gets underway on June 11 with Iran scheduled to kick off their campaign against New Zealand in Los Angeles four days later.

The idea of replacing Iran is not new. Zampolli made a similar appeal ahead of the 2022 World Cup, which FIFA ignored. Existing regulations allow the governing body discretion in exceptional circumstances, but there is no indication such measures are being considered.

In the seemingly unlikely scenario of Iran being excluded from this year's tournament, the decision on who would replace them lies in the hands of FIFA, who under Article Six of the World Cup regulations is at liberty to call up any nation it chooses to fill the vacancy.

The AFC would be expected to lobby hard for the replacement to come from Asia with the United Arab Emirates, who lost a qualifying playoff to Iraq last November, the obvious choice.

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