

## ORPITA & CO SEAL MAIDEN ASIAN GAMES SPOT

Bangladesh captain Orpita Pal celebrates with teammates during their 2-1 win against Hong Kong in their final Pool A fixture of the Asian Games Qualifiers in Jakarta yesterday. Nadira Ema and Kona Akter scored the two goals after Hong Kong had taken the lead. The women in red and green, playing their first international tournament at senior level, sealed a semifinal berth in this campaign, thereby earning a place in the Asian Games.

PHOTO: AHF



## 'LET THEM PLAY' Litton sets tone for T20 return

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI from Chattogram

Bangladesh return to T20I cricket today after around a five-month gap, with skipper Litton Das keen to strike a balance between rediscovering rhythm and laying the groundwork for sterner tests ahead.

Still smarting from missing out on the T20 World Cup earlier this year, the Tigers begin their three-match series against New Zealand at the Bir Sreshtho Flight Lieutenant Matiur Rahman Stadium in Chattogram. Yet, rather than burden his side with expectations, Litton has opted for a more relaxed approach.

"Let them play," the captain said on the eve of the match -- a simple message that reflects both the mood in the camp and the nature of this return.

Litton, however, is not looking to start from scratch. Instead, he wants to build on the cohesion developed during campaign for the last T20 World Cup.

"We had great team bonding, and our preparation for the last T20 World Cup was very good. I will try to hold onto the team well and build from there," he said.

Confidence is also buoyed by a 2-1 comeback win in the preceding ODI series against the Black Caps. But while Bangladesh may approach this contest with a degree of freedom, there is little room to ignore the issues that have lingered.

Recent T20 form paints a mixed picture. Last year, series wins over Afghanistan and Ireland showed promise, but the 3-0 whitewash against the West Indies exposed vulnerabilities -- particularly with the bat.

The bowling unit has largely held

its own, but the batting remains a concern despite a relatively settled line-up over the past year and a half. Opener Tanzid Tamim has impressed, but Saif Hassan has struggled for consistency. Litton himself comes into the series on the back of runs in ODIs, yet questions persist in the middle order.

Parvez Hossain Emon, Towhid Hridoy, and Shamim Hossain are still searching for stability in their roles. Hridoy, in particular, has struggled to maintain tempo, crossing a strike-rate of 100 in only three of his last 12

there's no need to rely on the lower order," he said.

He also pointed to the importance of building deeper batting resources. "Big teams have immense batting depth, often down to number nine. If we can build that depth, our top-order batters will be able to play much more freely."

For now, though, the focus remains on easing back into the format without overcomplicating things.

"We are playing the T20 format again after a long time," Litton



PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

T20I innings. Shamim, meanwhile, has yet to make a significant impact in recent outings, especially in the finishing role.

Lower down, Mohammad Saifuddin offers depth with the bat, but contributions from others remain inconsistent. While Rishad Hossain has shown glimpses of power-hitting, greater reliability is needed, especially with high-profile series against Australia and India looming later this year.

Litton acknowledged the imbalance but stressed clarity of roles.

"As a batter, if we fulfil our roles,

said. "I don't want to put any extra pressure on anyone."

New faces like Abdul Gaffar Saqlain and Ripon Mondol could get opportunities as part of that process, with the captain keen to test combinations.

With nine T20Is against top opposition lined up in quick succession later this year, Litton sees this phase as a stepping stone.

For Bangladesh, this is more than just a return -- it is a reset. A chance to play with freedom, address lingering flaws, and gradually shape a side capable of standing up to tougher challenges on the horizon.

## Latham relying on footage, adaptability

SPORTS REPORTER from Chattogram

Tom Latham said New Zealand have been analysing available footage of Bangladesh players ahead of the T20I series, particularly as several members of the hosts' squad are yet to debut in the format.

Bangladesh have included newcomers Ripon Mondol and Abdul Gaffar Saqlain, while frontline seamers Taskin Ahmed, Mustafizur Rahman and Shoriful Islam have been rested for the series, which begins today.

"We've seen a bit of footage on the guys. Understand there might be some guys that haven't debuted yet in this format. So I guess when, you know, there's not heaps of information on players that you haven't seen, it's about trying to adapt as quick as you can," Latham said during the press conference on Sunday.

The New Zealand skipper was unsure whether this Bangladesh side was the most explosive in the format, but stressed the importance of focusing on their own approach. "It's about playing what's in front of us, regardless of the opposition personnel, and making the best decisions from there," he added.

New Zealand have also made several changes from the ODI side that suffered a 2-1 series defeat. Latham believes those with limited international exposure can rely on their domestic experience.

"We do have guys with international or not as much experience internationally, but they do have a lot of experience domestically. So for them it's just going out, expressing themselves as much as they can, for us playing our brand of cricket, a brand that we want to play, and obviously adapting," he concluded.

➤ Bangladesh have a poor head-to-head record against New Zealand, winning only four of the 20 T20Is between the two sides. The Black Caps have won 15, while one match produced no result.

➤ This will be New Zealand's first T20I against Bangladesh at this venue in Chattogram. All six of their previous T20Is against the hosts were played in Mirpur.

➤ However, New Zealand have played four matches at this venue before, during the 2014 T20 World Cup.

## Domestic form earns Amite, Tanzid maiden Test call-ups

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh have handed maiden Test call-ups to Tanzid Tamim and Amite Hasan for the opening match of next month's two-Test series against Pakistan, with selectors rewarding consistent performances in the longer format.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) announced a 15-member squad on Sunday for the first Test, scheduled to begin on May 8 at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur. The second Test will be held in Sylhet from May 16, with both matches forming part of the 2025-27 ICC World Test Championship cycle.

The spotlight, however, falls firmly on the two uncapped batters.

When it comes to the longer format, Amite could indeed be said to have "earned" his way into the side. A regular across competitions such as the Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) and the National Cricket League (NCL), the 23-year-old has been on an upward trajectory since making his first-class debut in 2019. He has accumulated 3,650 runs in 49 matches, including 11 centuries and 17 fifties, at an average of just over 49.

"Amite has earned his call-up as he has been



one of the most consistent batters in our first-class cricket. His temperament stands out and we believe it is well-suited for Test cricket. This format demands patience and discipline, and he has shown those qualities over a sustained period," chief selector Kazi Habibur Bashar said in a BCB media release.

His progress has been underpinned by notable performances. Last year, he scored his second NCL double century, matching his career-best 213, and recently struck 162 for East Zone against Central Zone in Sylhet in the opening round of the BCL.

Tanzid's inclusion, meanwhile, brings a different dimension. Known for his exploits in white-ball cricket and part of Bangladesh's Under-19 World Cup winning squad in 2020, the left-handed opener has also built a solid first-class record. He has scored 1,792 runs in 25 matches at an average of 40.

"Tanzid has been in our thoughts for Test cricket. He has a very good first-class record and we felt he deserved the opportunity to showcase his ability in Tests. He has a sound technique and plenty of natural ability. We are confident that if he gets the chance, he can perform well in the longer format," Bashar said.

Meanwhile, Taskin Ahmed returns to the Test side after an extended absence due to injury concerns, alongside Shoriful Islam. Off-spinner Nayeem Hasan has also been recalled, having last played against Sri Lanka in June last year.

For Tanzid and Amite, the upcoming Test offers an opportunity to carry their domestic form onto the international stage and establish themselves in Bangladesh's red-ball setup.

### SQUAD

Najmul Hossain Shanto (Captain), Mahmudul Hasan Joy, Shadman Islam, Mominul Haque, Mushfiqur Rahim, Litton Das, Mehidy Hasan Miraz (Vice Captain), Taijul Islam, Nayeem Hasan, Ebadot Hossain Chowdhury, Shoriful Islam, Taskin Ahmed, Nahid Rana, Tanzid Tamim, Amite Hasan

45 DAYS TO GO



## From sparse stands to packed arenas

Across the 22 FIFA World Cups held so far, the average attendance per match stands at 45,577 spectators. The highest average crowd was recorded at the 1994 USA World Cup, with 68,991, while the lowest came in the 1938 France World Cup, with 20,889.

\*\*Visit The Daily Star's website to also read: 'Germany vs Germany: The duel that happened only once'



Sabastian Sawe proudly holds aloft a running shoe while posing in front the electronic time, showing his record-setting run in the London Marathon yesterday. The Kenyan defending champion broke the two-hour mark for the first time in history, crossing the finish line in 1hr 59min 30sec. It shattered by 65 seconds the previous best of 2:00:35 set in Chicago in 2023 by the late Kelvin Kiptum.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## BFF trims list of coaches to 26

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) on Sunday narrowed its shortlist of candidates for the national team's head coach to 26, with European and Latin American applicants dominating the pool.

A four-member committee, including BFF technical director Saiful Bari Titu, has been tasked with reviewing applications. Despite the submission deadline set for April 30, the committee has already reduced the number of applicants from around 270 to 26.

"On Saturday, we cut the list down to 30, and today [Sunday] we have brought it down to 26, which features coaches from Germany, Portugal, Belgium, Croatia, Argentina, Brazil, along with one from Bangladesh," BFF technical committee chairman Kamrul Islam Hilton told The Daily Star.

He added that Zulfikar Mahmud Mintu is the sole Bangladeshi coach to be among those shortlisted.

Hilton further revealed that the number of goalkeeping coach candidates has been reduced to 10, which includes local coach Nuruzzaman Noyon.

"We will meet once or twice more before forwarding the final shortlist to the National Teams Committee by April 30. Applications are still coming in and we are waiting to see if any more high-profile coaches submit their CVs," he said.

Responding to queries about the selection process, Hilton explained that candidates are being assessed based on several criteria, including professional coaching licences, an age range of 40 to 60, prior experience with national teams, and familiarity with working in Asia, among other factors.