



Athapaththu's SL whitewash Tigresses

Chamari Athapaththu led from the front as Sri Lanka completed a dominant 3-0 series whitewash over Bangladesh, winning the rain-curtailed third and final Women's Twenty20 International by three runs in Sylhet yesterday. In a shortened nine-over-a-side contest, the Tigresses fell short in their chase of 88 runs. Athapaththu, who was named both player of the match and player of the series, delivered an outstanding all-round performance, scoring 41 off 27 balls and taking two wickets for 15 runs. The T20I series defeat for Nigar Sultana Joy and her teammates comes on the heels of a 2-1 loss in the preceding Women's ODI series held in Rajshahi. Reflecting on the tour, Sri Lanka skipper Athapaththu said, "I'm really happy with my team's performance throughout this tour. With the World Cup coming up, we needed to improve in a couple of areas, especially power-hitting and fielding."



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

More venues, healthier diet as DPL returns

SPORTS REPORTER

Following months of uncertainty, the Dhaka Premier League is set to begin on May 4 across six venues. The country's premier one-day competition had faced doubts over its staging amid unrest surrounding the Bangladesh Cricket Board elections, which ultimately led to the fall of the Aminul Islam-led board last month.

BCB ad hoc committee president Tamim Iqbal acknowledged the challenges and outlined several changes for the upcoming edition. "This is one of the most important tournaments in our cricket ecosystem. It was challenging to organise, as cricket had been stagnant for the last few months," he said yesterday, thanking the clubs for helping resume the competition.

➤ The 12-team tournament, sponsored by Walton and powered by Bashundhara Cement, will feature 66 matches, with fixtures for the first three rounds announced and reserve days in place due to the rainy season.

➤ Matches will, for the first time, be spread across six venues -- Pubergaon Shikha Protisthan Ground 2, Cricketers Academy (300 Feet), BKSP Grounds 3 and 4, Bashundhara Sports City Complex and ULAB -- to ease travel demands.

➤ Medical support has been strengthened with ambulances at all venues and plans for ICU units at selected grounds, including BKSP

➤ BCB will provide healthier lunch options for all teams, with a fitness-focused menu replacing traditional heavy meals.

➤ Anti-Corruption Unit protocols used in the Bangladesh Premier League will be reinstated, with players and officials required to submit phones before matches, leaving access only to team managers.



New Zealand pacer Nathan Smith removed Bangladesh's Tanzid Tamim and Parvez Hossain Emon in successive deliveries early on before rain interrupted the third and final T20I in Mirpur yesterday. Despite a brief rebuilding phase, Bangladesh suffered another collapse after the restart and were bundled out for a modest 102-run total, never enough in a match reduced to 15 overs a side. [Bottom] New Zealand batter Bevon Jacobs struck an unbeaten 62 as the visitors chased the target down with six wickets and 20 balls to spare, levelling the three-match series 1-1.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Litton urges lower order to step up

SPORTS REPORTER

Going into the series, skipper Litton Das had raised concerns over the Bangladesh lower-middle order's output with the bat. In yesterday's rain-curtailed T20I series decider in Mirpur, the lower-order chaos was exhibited again during a six-wicket defeat that saw New Zealand draw level.

Both openers, Tanzid Tamim and Saif Hassan, struggled during the series. During the 180-plus chase in the opening fixture, their Powerplay contributions had actually put the side under further pressure before the middle order recovered to guide a solid chase in Chattogram.

Coming into the third and final clash, Bangladesh, batting first, lost their last six wickets for just 16 runs, showing the vulnerability of a batting order in a format where death overs contributions can have a huge impact.

"I said before that the lower order has responsibility and we want that they have some output with the bat. There was space today [to make contributions], but it was failure once again," Litton said flatly, underlining his disappointment.

Litton and Tawhid Hridoy had put on a partnership, but the tempo was different after the almost two-hour rain break. Bangladesh had lost three wickets before the break, but could not quite build on partnerships ever



since. "When you bat two different ways, knowing your strength is six batters, you will not be able to take big risks."

"When you get a break like that in the T20 format, and overs too are reduced, it brings extra pressure since you have to give a big total. Obviously, when you play a high-risk game, you can get out. If I hadn't gotten out to that shot, maybe the game would have gone deeper," Litton said of his innings.

When Shamim Hossain was dismissed, Bangladesh's innings quickly unravelled. The lower-middle order of Mahedi Hasan, Rishad Hossain and Mohammad Saifuddin contributed 12 runs. In the last two years, Jaker Ali and Mahedi have played the most matches at number six -- 10 and 14 matches, respectively. Mahedi, in 14 innings during that period,

averages just over five, contributing 21 runs.

Litton outlined that they needed five bowlers for the 20 overs and needed their spinners to score, having already asked a reporter if there are any players in Bangladesh "who can bat at seven and bowl four overs".

"Rishad [Hossain], Mahedi and Nasum [Ahmed] are playing as spinners. All over the world, those who play as spinners can bat... Mahedi can bat, but we need his performances [with bat] in international cricket, same with Rishad and Nasum.

"For all-rounders, we have Saifuddin and [Abdul Gaffar] Saqlain, along with [Tanzim] Sakib, and we expect some batting from them because there will be games like this where we need our lower order to fire."

Archers look to build on Asia Cup gold

SPORTS REPORTER

The second stage of the Archery World Cup is set to take place in Shanghai, China, with Bangladesh competing in all 10 events across recurve and compound disciplines, including individual, team and mixed categories. A 13-member Bangladesh contingent will leave the country today.

The Bangladesh Archery Federation held a press conference at the Bangladesh Olympic Association on Saturday in this regard, with the archers also in attendance.

Speaking about expectations, coach Martin Frederick emphasised that the primary focus is long-term preparation.

"The World Cup is part of our build-up to the Asian Games. From there, qualification for the Los Angeles Olympic Games will begin. So this is a very important and demanding period for us," said the long-serving German coach.

Elaborating on the team's targets, Frederick added: "We had a successful Asia Cup, winning gold in the men's compound team event and securing a few top-10 finishes. We want to carry that momentum into global competition, though the World Cup is another level. Reaching the quarter-finals or finishing in the top 10 would be a strong step, opening the door to the semifinals and, hopefully, a breakthrough towards medal matches."

Bangladesh head into the competition with confidence after their gold medal success in the men's compound team event at last month's Asia Cup in Thailand, raising expectations particularly in the compound section. Team member Himu Bachhar said, "We performed well in the Asia Cup and hope to maintain that consistency at the World Cup."

39
DAYS



Veteran Pepe's knockout milestone

The record for the oldest goalscorer in the knockout stages of the World Cup is held by Pepe. Most recently, in the Round of 16 at the 2022 FIFA World Cup, he found the net with a header in Portugal's 6-1 win over Switzerland. He was 39 years and 283 days old that day.

**Visit The Daily Star's website to also read: 'The 11-second wonder: How Sukur stunned the hosts.'

FIFA Congress: Sport meets politics

AGENCIES

The FIFA Congress, which concluded yesterday in Vancouver, brought together global football leaders but was marked as much by controversy as by decision-making.

A central issue was Iran's participation in the upcoming 2026 World Cup. Despite political tensions following a conflict involving the United States and Israel, FIFA president Gianni Infantino confirmed that Iran will compete in the USA as scheduled. This decision rejected Iran's earlier request to relocate their matches to Mexico.



over alleged links to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

Although cleared to enter, reports indicated the officials faced restrictions and ultimately chose to leave, fuelling claims that Iranian officials had effectively been denied entry and escalating diplomatic tensions. Iran now seeks urgent talks with FIFA in Zurich to avoid further complications.

Beyond geopolitics, FIFA made several significant decisions.

Financially, the organisation announced a 15% increase in funding for all 48 World Cup teams, reflecting its strong economic position.

Additionally, Infantino revealed

unprecedented demand for the tournament, with 500 million ticket requests already recorded -- ten times more than previous editions.

At the same time, FIFA acknowledged criticism over soaring prices for the 2026 tournament and said it would review its ticketing strategy for the 2030 World Cup amid fan backlash.

Infantino confirmed his intention to run for a fourth term as FIFA president, with elections scheduled in 2027. His tenure has been defined by expansion, including the move to a 48-team World Cup.

FIFA also announced a stricter crackdown against racism on the pitch. Under new rules, players

who cover their mouths during confrontations -- often seen as an attempt to conceal discriminatory language -- could face a red card, signalling a tougher stance on abusive behaviour.

Outside the Congress venue, protests highlighted growing concerns about the social impact of mega events.

Activists and workers criticised rising living costs, displacement of homeless populations and lack of fair wages. Calls for a "FIFA dividend" emphasised the need for the organisation to reinvest in host communities.

Football-related tensions also surfaced inside the Congress. A notable moment involved Palestinian and Israeli officials, reflecting broader geopolitical divisions. Meanwhile, fans of the Vancouver Whitecaps FC protested against the possible relocation of their club.

The FIFA Congress showcased major financial and structural progress for global football but also revealed deep political and social challenges.

As the 2026 World Cup approaches, FIFA faces increasing pressure to balance sport, politics and social responsibility on the world stage.



INTER ON BRINK OF 21ST SCUDETTO

Serie A leaders Inter Milan could be crowned champions of Italy this weekend when they take on Parma at the San Siro on Sunday. Holding a 10-point lead over Napoli, Inter need just one win in their final four matches to secure a 21st league title and third in six seasons. However, when Inter fans take to their seats on Sunday night, their Scudetto celebrations might already be underway, if Napoli lose to Como on Saturday and AC Milan -- 12 points back in third -- fail to win at Sassuolo on Sunday afternoon.

PHOTO: INTER MILAN



However, Iran's absence from the Congress drew attention. Federation president Mehdi Taj and his delegation withdrew after being detained and questioned by Canadian authorities in Toronto