

## Concerns mount for Tigresses

SPORTS REPORTER

The recent three-match WT20I series in Sylhet has raised eyebrows and sparked concern over the Bangladesh women's team, with just over a month remaining before the Women's T20 World Cup in England and Wales.

Traditionally, the Tigresses have yet to establish themselves as a formidable force in T20 cricket, and apart from their 2018 Asia Cup triumph, they have achieved little of note in the format.

Moreover, their conservative approach has often left them under pressure. The team is yet to successfully chase a target of 150 in T20s, despite playing nearly 150 matches over the past 14 years.

Against Sri Lanka, Bangladesh won the toss in all three matches but opted to field first – despite their struggles while chasing. Additionally, captain Nigar Sultana Joty endured a lean run, scoring just 20 runs across three innings.

Chief selector Sazzad Ahmed Shipon acknowledged the team's struggles but said the series was used as an opportunity to experiment ahead of the global tournament.

"We changed the team in every match to try different combinations. For the first time in a while, we even played without a leg spinner in the last match. Even though we aren't typically strong in chasing, we chose to chase because we will face strong teams in the World Cup and need to be prepared for big targets," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

"To be honest, we are better in the ODI format. We aren't as strong in T20s because we have very few hard-hitting players who can clear the boundary," he added, while also expressing confidence in Joty.

"She scored runs in the ODIs. In T20s, we are trying a new combination. We tried Juairiya and Dilara as openers, and both performed well in the powerplay, scoring at nearly 10 runs per over. The issue is our batting pattern – we need to adjust it so we can accelerate and maintain intensity until the end of the innings."

Shipon informed that Bangladesh will finalise their squad for the World Cup on May 5, though it will not be disclosed immediately. He added that the same squad touring Scotland for the tri-series is likely to feature in the World Cup.

Bangladesh are expected to leave for Scotland on May 24 or 25 following a training camp in Mirpur.

"There is a camp starting on May 12 for eight days, until the 20th," Shipon said. "We will likely stay in Dhaka and use the indoor facilities or academy grounds."

The women's tri-series, featuring Bangladesh, Scotland and the Netherlands, will begin on May 28. Bangladesh will open their World Cup campaign against the Netherlands on June 14 in Birmingham.

# DPL begins amid renewed optimism

SPORTS REPORTER

Broader facilities, fresh initiatives, and the promise of fiercer competition have lifted spirits ahead of the Dhaka Premier Division Cricket League (DPL) 2025-26, which begins today across six venues. Above all, however, players are simply relieved to see the tournament return after a prolonged period of uncertainty.

The competition will begin without national Test players, who are set to miss the opening six rounds until May 20 due to Bangladesh's upcoming two-match Test series against Pakistan, according to Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) cricket operations in-charge Shahriar Nafees.

On the field, the prospect of a more competitive season has added to the excitement. With at least four teams in contention, defending champions Abahani skipper Mosaddek Hossain believes the balance across squads could make the difference.

"Previously, there were maybe four or five teams that stood out as very strong. But this year, everyone has tried to build fairly balanced sides. If the weather [overcast conditions] continues like this, any team can be dangerous on any given day," Mosaddek said.

Mohammedan captain Tawhid



(L) Players of defending champions Abahani take part in a training drill at the Cricketers' Academy in Purbachal on Sunday, ahead of today's opening round match of the Dhaka Premier League. However, with a home Test series of Bangladesh against Pakistan commencing on May 8, most of the embers of the Test side, including Mohammedan veteran Mushfiqur Rahim (R), were involved in a national team camp in Mirpur.



PHOTO: ABAHANI/FIROZ AHMED

Hridoy echoed that sentiment, promising to be "delivering as a unit," while remaining mostly relieved as the tournament starts after prolonged uncertainty.

"Even cricketers from the Second and Third Divisions didn't get opportunities recently, which is unfortunate. So it's a relief that the tournament is finally starting," he said.

This season carries added significance after a turbulent lead-up that left the tournament's fate in limbo. Several clubs had threatened a boycott over concerns regarding the legitimacy of the Aminul Islam Bulbul-led BCB, but the impasse was resolved following the formation of an ad hoc committee headed by Tamim Iqbal. The former national captain will be present at today's

inauguration ceremony, alongside State Minister for Youth and Sports Aminul Haque.

For Hridoy, there is further reason for optimism. The Mohammedan skipper, who was handed a four-match ban last season by the Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolitan (CCDM) for dissent – ruling him out of the title decider – will not have the remaining three matches of his

suspension carried into this season.

"In domestic cricket, such incidents are counted for one year from the date they occur. Since that period has passed, he is now free to play," CCDM coordinator Mohammad Salim told The Daily Star.

Meanwhile, the Tamim-led ad hoc committee's latest initiatives – including enhanced in-game medical support, healthier, fitness-focused meal plans, and reinstatement of Anti-Corruption Unit protocols for a fairer game – contributed to a more positive atmosphere around the competition.

All 12 teams will be in action on the opening day. Reigning champions Abahani face Dhaka Leopards at the Bashundhara Sports City Complex, the venue for the inauguration ceremony, while runners-up Mohammedan take on City Club at BKSP 3.

CCDM, in coordination with the BCB, has confirmed a single-league format for this year, scrapping the Super League and Relegation League phases.

A total of 66 matches will be played, with reserve days in place to minimise disruptions. The team finishing top of the table will be crowned champions, while the bottom two sides will be relegated to the Dhaka First Division Cricket League.

## Promise flickers, problems persist

EKUSH TAPADER

With galleries buzzing despite torrential rain, the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur seemed to regain its soul – fuelled by hopes of a T20I series win for Bangladesh.

Instead, the rain-hit third and final T20I against New Zealand on Saturday followed a familiar, frustrating script. Litton Das and Co. were beaten by an inexperienced touring side, leaving the three-match series drawn 1-1 after Bangladesh had won the opener, and the second game was washed out in Chattogram.

For a New Zealand team missing around 15 frontline players due to commitments in the Indian Premier League and the Pakistan Super League, the result raised questions. Yet Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB) chief selector Habibur Bashar declined to term it as a "terrible outcome".

Bangladesh's T20 side has recently hinted at a shift in identity – moving away from their traditionally cautious approach towards a more proactive brand of cricket. However, that evolution remains largely untested at the highest level, especially after missing out on the most recent T20 World Cup.

This series marked the start of preparations for the 2028 edition, but the performances exposed lingering concerns. The top-order fragility resurfaced as a major issue, while the middle order had a fifty percent success rate.

In the first match, chasing 182, early wickets left Bangladesh on the brink. A spirited counterattack from Tawhid Hridoy, Shamim Hossain, and Parvez



Hossain delivered a convincing win, showcasing the potential of the middle order.

But in Mirpur, the same problems persisted. The top order faltered again, and this time the lower order followed suit, leading to a comprehensive defeat.

"Our first match was very organised, but we lost our way in the final game," Bashar told The Daily Star, urging caution in judging a series heavily affected by rain. "We are trying new things, so it's not right to be overly critical based on these two matches. I liked the look of this team – the

gelling, spirit, and teamwork are good."

With experienced pacers Mustafizur Rahman and Taskin Ahmed rested, the series offered opportunities to new faces. Ripon Mondol featured in both matches but went wicketless, while Abdul Gaffar Saqlain did not get a game. Shoriful Islam stood out as the lone bright spot, earning the Most Valuable Player of the Series award.

"The weather didn't help us," Bashar noted. "There is a long way to go. It's a new squad, especially in the bowling department. If these players contribute going forward, it will strengthen the team. Our two main bowlers will return, which will make us stronger."

Bashar also dismissed concerns over New Zealand fielding a second-string side, noting that experimentation is a natural phase for any team in the lead-up to a World Cup.

Bangladesh, too, are committed to that path, but only with the existing group as it appears. Further changes, including possible rotation in the batting order, are on the cards. Vice-captain Saif Hassan remains under scrutiny, having failed to register a fifty in his last eight T20Is while maintaining a modest strike rate of 104.5.

While Bashar emphasised giving "everyone a chance" to build competition within the squad, the experimentation so far has largely been limited to the existing group.

That raises a pressing question: will persistence with this core be enough, or is it time for a broader rethink before the countdown to the 2028 World Cup gathers pace?



## Asia's trailblazers: South Korea

Among Asian teams, South Korea have played the most number of World Cup matches (38). They have won seven, drawn 10, and lost 21 matches. They also became the first team from outside Europe and the Americas to reach the semifinals, doing so in 2002, when they co-hosted the tournament with Japan.

**\*\* Visit The Daily Star's website to also read: "Atlas Lions unleashed: Morocco's unforgettable march to the final four."**

## Youth hockey gets major lift with Epyllion deal

SPORTS REPORTER

On the back of consistent success by youth hockey teams on the international stage, the Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) received a major financial boost ahead of the Men's and Women's U-18 Asia Cup in Japan, signing an MoU with Epyllion Group on Sunday.

Under the agreement, local clothing brand Sailor, a sister concern of Epyllion Group, will provide BHF with Tk one crore to support the participation of both the men's and women's teams in the upcoming AHF U-18 Asia Cup, scheduled to be held in Japan from May 29 to June 6.

Bangladesh have been drawn in Pool B of the men's competition alongside Pakistan, Malaysia and China. The women's team have also been placed in Pool B, where they will face China, Japan and Chinese Taipei.

"We usually work in the youth sector across different sports federations, universities and districts. This time, we have aligned with youth hockey, which has been performing well at the international level," said Sadequzzaman Khan, senior brand and marketing manager of Sailor,

at a press conference held at the BHF conference room on Sunday.

"If we can further empower this youth through sponsorship, they will have greater opportunities to flourish. With that in mind, we have joined hands with Bangladesh hockey," he added, noting that the company is also open to supporting other areas such as leagues and tournaments in the future.



"We require a significant amount of funding for both the boys' and girls' teams to take part in the Asia Cup. This sponsorship will cover around 45 percent of the total expenditure, and we now need to secure the remaining funds from other sources," said Reazul Hasan, general secretary of BHF.

He added that both teams are expected to leave for Japan on May 26. Meanwhile, the squads – comprising players from BKSP – will be guided by Moududur Rahman Shuvo for the men's team, while Zahid Hasan Raju will resume training of the women's U-18 side on May 5 following the senior team's return from the Asian Games Qualifiers.



Viktor Gyokeres nods home a looping header into the Fulham net as Arsenal beat their London rivals 3-0 at the Emirates Stadium in their Premier League fixture on Saturday. The Swede scored twice as the Gunners went six points clear of Manchester City at the top of the table. City, meanwhile, have played two matches less and can cut the gap to three points with a win over Everton tonight. (Inset) Meanwhile, Robert Lewandowski and Ferran Torres scored late as Barcelona edged Osasuna 2-1 in a frantic finish at Estadio El Sadar, inching closer to retaining the LaLiga title with a 14-point lead over chasers Real Madrid.

PHOTO: REUTERS/AFP

