

Bashar exudes confidence



BISHWAJIT ROY from Jaipur

The records definitely speak in favour of West Indies, but Habibul Bashar believes that the stage is all set for them to turn the table around at the Sawai Mansingh Stadium in Jaipur today.

The 33-year-old Bangladesh captain said that if they can carry their confidence they gained from the first match against Sri Lanka into the match then it would not be an impossible task to win the do-or-die battle against the Caribbeans.

"We have to win the match if we want to qualify for the main stage. Another point is we have to prove that we are not only good for one match. This is a do-or-die match but I told my boys not to take any pressure rather put their best effort on the field. I

honestly believe that if we can play to our potential then anything is possible," said a confident Bashar.

West Indies are the only world champions that Bangladesh have not beaten in a limited-overs game. But Bashar believes that this match can turn the Pink City into red and green if his side beat the once formidable force.

"We are yet to win any match against the West Indies. It would be really fantastic if we can do it here tomorrow. The team is bubbling with confidence to enforce a different result," said the country's premier batsman.

The Tigers lost nine of their 11 games against the West Indies while the other two ended as no result.

Although Bangladesh suffered a humiliating 138-run defeat in their last meeting in the same competition in England two years ago, Bashar said that they were eager to bury the bitter past despite the fact that Brian

Lara's defending champions started their campaign with an emphatic nine-wicket success against Zimbabwe in Ahmedabad on Monday.

"Yes, West Indies have been playing good cricket but I think they are not as consistent as Sri Lanka. I don't believe that we are not capable of beating West Indies though they have world class players like Lara, Gayle and Sarwan," said Bashar.

"Our main objective is to win the match, but I will not mind if we can produce our best and then lose the match," he added.

Bashar was also happy about the fact that the wickets at Jaipur are like the ones at home and not lively like Mohali, where Bangladesh lost to Sri Lanka by 37 runs, chasing 303.

"The wickets here will be like the ones at home, but it will be an advantage only if we can play to our potential. No doubt the condition will suit our spinners. It's now upto them how they exploit the conditions," he

explained, adding that his ace left-arm spinner Mohammad Rafique, who has always been successful against the West Indies, would be a key factor.

"I think our spinners will play a big role in the match. Over the years Rafique served the team to the best of his ability. He also played very well in the first match. I am looking forward to him," he said.

The Bangladesh skipper was also excited with the efforts of the tail-enders in the last game and said that it would be an interesting game if they could continue it in this vital encounter.

"Despite only one fifty (Sakib Al Hasan) we amassed 267 runs in the last game because of tail-enders' effort. It's now time for our top-order to live up to the challenge in this crunch match," he added.

Ad



Bangladesh players exercise prior to a training session at the Sawai Mansingh Stadium on Tuesday on the eve of their Champions Trophy qualifying match against West Indies in Jaipur.

PHOTO: AFP



Did U Know?

South Africa won the first and only Commonwealth Games cricket gold medal beating Australia in Kuala Lumpur, 1998.



Shahid Afridi

(Pakistan all-rounder)
"Inzamam's absence is a big blow for us in the tournament (ICC Champions Trophy) and it is for senior batsmen to show more responsibility."

What to WATCH

BTV & SET Max
ICC Champions Trophy
Bangladesh v West Indies
Live at 2:45 pm

ESPN
Sportscenter India
Live at 8:30 pm

Zee Sports
Euro 2008 qualifiers
Georgia v Italy
Live at 11:30 pm

Pietersen set to open

BBC ONLINE, undated

Chairman of selectors David Graveney says England could use either Andrew Flintoff or Kevin Pietersen to open the batting in the ICC Champions Trophy.

Graveney said: "Attacking the first 10 overs of the powerplay is going to be a critical part of the game."

He said the absence of both Marcus Trescothick and Michael Vaughan in India might create an opportunity to give Andrew Strauss a new partner.

England's first match is against the hosts on Sunday in Mohali.

Led by Strauss and with Flintoff out injured, England found batting aggressively in the first part of the innings difficult against Sri Lanka

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2007 ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS Uzbek test for Bangladesh



SPORTS REPORTER

A new-look Bangladesh will face mighty Uzbekistan in the 2007 Asian Cup football qualifiers today under a new captain.

Goalkeeper Aminul Haque will lead a relatively young side in absence of midfield stalwarts Arman Mia and captain Arif Khan Joy, who retired after Bangladesh's last international against Qatar.

The match will kick off at 3pm at the Army Stadium in Banani, the tiny venue hosting only its second international after staging an AFC Challenge Cup match last April.

Having lost all their matches so far, Bangladesh are eyeing on fielding a young team, mostly to give the under-23 players exposure ahead of the Asian Games and the Olympic football qualifiers.

Hasanuzzaman Babloo, who took over from Argentine coach Diego Cruciani in the middle of the ongoing qualifying competition, felt that although it would be a home match, the task for Bangladesh is daunting.

"Uzbekistan are one of the leading teams in Asia and would be hungry to win because of their position in the group," said Babloo.

The Uzbeks have so far won only one game, a 5-0 victory against Bangladesh in Tashkent on the opening day of the group. Tied with Hong Kong on five points at second place, the Central Asians lead on goal difference but must win to book a place in the finals.

"We have nothing to lose but our efforts would be to fight and better our performance than our previous matches against Qatar at home and abroad. A slender defeat to Uzbekistan would be appreciable but if we can hold them to a draw, it would be an achievement," said Babloo who would be happy to see rightback Hassan Al Mamun and attacking midfielder Mehdi Hassan Ujjal available for selection after recovering from injury.

"We have prepared for two weeks for this game but when we travelled to Uzbekistan after eight months' training, we conceded five goals. So, anything can happen."

"Uzbekistan are ahead of us in all departments and our target is to keep things tight at the back as well as play good football," said the

former national winger, who prefers a three-man central defence compared to Cruciani's flat four backline.

Uzbekistan's Turkmenistan-born coach Valeri Nepomniatchi, who shot to fame in 1990 when he led Cameroon on an unlikely run to the quarterfinals at the World Cup with the Africans defeating defending champions Argentina, Romania and Colombia along the way, was worried about the weather.

"It's hot, almost 30 degrees here while at home, it was two to three," he said shortly after their arrival in Dhaka on Tuesday.

"We have to adopt to these conditions quickly," he said before his side rushed for an afternoon training session at the match venue. Whatever, I have confidence in our strong squad and we are here to win because we have no other way to qualify for the main event, said the coach whose side beat Latvian outfit Riga FC 2-0 in a preparation friendly at home on Saturday.

Nepomniatchi recalled Ilyas

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Uzbekistan players check in at the Sheraton Hotel after their arrival in the city yesterday for the 2007 Asian Cup qualifier against Bangladesh.

PHOTO: STAR

Tharanga on a roll



AFP, Ahmedabad

Upul Tharanga scored his second consecutive century to lift Sri Lanka to 285-7 from 50 overs in the Champions Trophy qualifying match against Zimbabwe here on Tuesday.

The 21-year-old left-hander, who hit 105 against Bangladesh on Saturday, continued his good form with 110, his sixth one-day century that was studded with 13 boundaries and a six.

Tharanga put on 165 in 169 balls for the third wicket with his mentor

Kumar Sangakkara (80) after Sri Lanka were struggling at 49-2 in the 11th over.

Both batsmen departed in successive overs attempting to force the pace, but Sri Lanka added 104

SL win in style

AFP, Ahmedabad

Sri Lanka defeated Zimbabwe by 144 runs on Tuesday to virtually assure themselves of playing in the main rounds of the Champions Trophy with their second consecutive win.

BRIEF SCORES

Sri Lanka 285-7 in 50 overs; Zimbabwe 141 all out in 42.3 overs

runs in the last 15 overs despite losing five wickets.

Tharanga made his international debut eight months after his home in Sri Lanka's west coast fishing town of Ambalangoda was swept away by the deadly tsunami which killed thousands across Asia on December 26, 2004.

Tharanga shifted based to Colombo where Sangakkara sheltered the talented youngster and gave him his entire cricket kit.

Sri Lanka elected to bat after winning the toss but were stunned when Sanath Jayasuriya was run out for nine and captain Mahela Jayawardene fell for four.

Zimbabwe, thrashed by the West Indies by nine wickets here on Sunday, put on an improved dis-

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Mehrab misses out as Tigers retain team

SPORTS REPORTER from Jaipur

There was a lot of speculation over the inclusion of uncapped all-rounder Mehrab Hossain but the team think-tank finally decided to stick with the same eleven which played against Sri Lanka on Saturday.

Even coach Dav Whatmore hinted in the morning while talking with the journalists at the team hotel lounge that the 19-year old player had a good chance of making his debut in the match. Ultimately however they chose not to gamble when they met in the evening to select the team.

"Yes we are thinking about an extra spinner who can also bat and field and honestly speaking Mehrab has a chance to make his debut. He might come in for a fast bowler and the bowler might be Syed Raseel. But we are still discussing," was what the coach commented in the morning.

But it seemed that captain Habibul Bashar and chief selector Faruque Ahmed were not interested to bring about changes in the side after they played an impressive game against the Lankans.

"We had a long discussion over the inclusion of Mehrab but finally we thought that there is no need to add a similar bowler to the team. Yes, if we include Mehrab then definitely batting order will be stronger but just think in that case the team will have four left-arm spinners," said Faruque.

"And another point was we didn't want to break the combination which played well against Sri Lanka," he added.

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Abahani soar, MSC bite the dust

SPORTS REPORTER

Local heavyweights and title contenders Abahani and Mohammedan Sporting Club had contrasting fortunes in yesterday's Green Delta Premier Hockey League.

While Abahani brushed aside Sadharan Bima 7-1 in the day's first match at the Maulana Bhasani National Hockey Stadium, Club Cup champions Mohammedan Sporting Club stumbled to a goalless draw against rank-outsiders Azad Sporting Club later on the day.

Mohammedan, who began the league with a comfortable 4-0 victory against Bima, dropped valuable points in the second match as their forwards failed to utilise second half chances.

After a mediocre first half, the black and whites dominated the show but Azad keeper Mehrab pulled off a series of brilliant saves including rival back Biplab's threatening hit in the dying moments.

Rony and Habul, who both scored in Mohammedan's 2-1 win over Abahani in last week's Club Cup final, wasted easy chances to deny the side full points.

Moreover, Mohammedan made a great escape three minutes from time when the BKSP-based Azad threatened to score from a penalty corner. Shamsul Alam beat goal

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SPORTS REPORTER from Jaipur

Habibul Bashar was happy with the International Cricket Council (ICC) initiative to allow captains to talk separately instead of all the members at a time.

"It is an appreciative initiative because it allowed me to talk freely about the problems we have been facing against the big teams. But had it been a collective, meeting I would have got little chance to raise our points in the captains' meeting," said Bashar after meeting with ICC cricket committee operation manager Dav Richardson at the Sheraton Hotel in Jaipur yesterday.

The ICC had earlier called the captains' meeting in Delhi on October 23 but now the governing body has decided to meet the respective country's captain independently.

"I have raised some specific issues to him (Richardson) and some problems we faced in the last few series against big teams," he added.

Bashar however declined to mention which issues he placed in the meeting.

TROPHY TREATS

MEHRAB THE SINGER

Mehrab Hossain might have to wait a bit longer to win his first national cap, but the young left-hander has already become the team's cheerleader ahead of Bangladesh's crunch match against the West Indies.

In an effort to show that his talent beyond the boundary of cricket, Mehrab played the role of a singer while the team was celebrating the 37th birthday of ace spinner Mohammad Rafique on Monday.

He crooned Bangla, English and Hindi songs with aplomb much to the delight of the Tigers at the team hotel in Jaipur.

"Mehrab is a very good singer. He sang some Bangla, English and Hindi songs which were really good," informed wicketkeeper Khaled Mashud.

Although Rafique's birthday was celebrated peacefully in the confinement of the posh hotel, it cratered confusion among the local journalists as it contradicted the official date put in different websites.

"I don't care with the official version. My son even celebrated

my birthday at home," said Rafique with a naive smile.

TIGERS IN JAIPUR JAIL!
After free rides in Chandigarh, where the Tigers went to shopping malls or to any places they wished to venture, the freedom has been curbed in Jaipur due to beefed up security.

It was not easy for the Tigers to go out from hotel and have a look around, popularly known as the Pink City, as the security people are very cautious about their movement.

While the crowded city is best explored on foot, the cricketers have been asked not to go out without any security permission or walk here and there.

"There is a security alert here that's why our movement is restricted. I think India is coming here that's why they took the initiative," said Bangladesh manager Khaled Mahmud.

He however was not unhappy with the restrictions.

Acme, StarTel keep winning

SPORTS REPORTER



SPORTS REPORTER

Nadif Chowdhury's late charge was not enough as Acme Laboratories saw off defending champions

Beximco by 40 runs in yesterday's GrameenPhone Corporate Cricket League at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium.

StarTel notched up an easy victory against Chittagong Port Authority (CPA) while Syfang Fan won their first match of the tournament when they defeated Channel F2 in the other matches of the day.

Acme's veteran Pakistani recruit Zahoor Elahi struck 90 off 107 balls, while youngster Marshall Ayub hit a splendid 82 off 86 balls coming in at number six as Acme scored 230 for 7 in their 50 overs.

Beximco, in reply, lost wickets in regular intervals and were reduced to seven for 78 in the 28th over thanks to a blistering spell from paceman Alamgir Kabir.

Nadif, who now plays just as a batsman, was then forced to take matters into his own hand. In a matter of an hour, the young left-hander smashed nine sixes in his 74-ball knock. But his luck ran out as soon as he reached his century. Kabir, who was adjudged the man-of-the-match, took the final wicket of Nadif to end the young batsman's superb resistance.

Opener Imran Ahmed saw off the heat and a sluggish Fatullah Stadium outfield to help StarTel win their second successive match as they trounced CPA by seven wickets.

The Chittagong-based side was put into bat and struggled their way to 156 for 9 in their 50 overs. Only Akhtaruzzaman made some significant contribution as he scored 47.

Pro League transfers soon!

SPORTS REPORTER

The ground inspection committee of the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) was convinced about the inaugural Professional Football League's launching before end of this year.

BFF general secretary Anwarul Hoque Helal, convener of the 11-member committee, told yesterday after the committee's inspection of the Bangabandhu National Stadium (BNS) that all concerning parties agreed that the ground would be ready by November.

The committee, which had their second inspection of the Bangabandhu Stadium yesterday, consists of BFF officials, representatives of clubs, footballers, referees and the National Sports Council.

"We realised that the venue would be ready by November and everyone agreed to take mental preparation for starting the pro League this year," Helal told after the committee's meeting in the afternoon.

The four club representatives, however, wanted to discuss the issue with the remaining club's officials, Helal informed.

"They have requested the BFF not to announce a transfer date just now but said they will give a positive decision after the clubs' October 15 meeting. We are looking forward to announce dates for transfer and the start after our executive committee meeting on October 17," Helal added.