

## SPORT



## Hassan urges Tigers to focus on cricket

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan visited the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday, the first day of Bangladesh's training camp for the upcoming tour of Pakistan.

The discussion among the cricketers in the dressing room centred more on the security measures that would be in place in Pakistan rather than cricketing matters. The Tigers are scheduled to reach Pakistan on January 23 for the first leg of a three-phase tour to take part in a three-match T20I series.

The BCB boss, who exchanged his views with the team management, gave assurance to the players about the security measures.

"We did not want to discuss security with the players. There was a small discussion, however, and I told them there is nothing to worry about and that they should think more about the game. Performance will be affected if the players are thinking

about it [security]," Hassan told the media yesterday.

"Cricket is a tough game to play without mental peace and on top of that the format is T20, a tense format. I have told them to keep calm and that InshaAllah everything will be fine. I will be joining them and will stay with them and we will eat together as well. There will be no issues," he added.

According to Hassan, Bangladesh will have their own security personnel even before the team reaches Pakistan and that they would be able to understand the situation once they complete the first leg of the tour.

"Personnel from the national security agencies will travel exclusively with our cricketers along with our BCB security. We have seen their [PCB's] security plan and there is nothing more that can be done. The fact is that incidents can happen anywhere now. Situation for us [BCB] would have been different if this was simply a bilateral series. We have the ICC Test Championship matches that we need to play, so we naturally had no option [but to travel to Pakistan]," he added.



**EAT TOGETHER, SLEEP TOGETHER:** Bangladesh Cricket Board President Nazmul Hassan (3rd from R) speaks to a few players during a practice session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. With the Tigers set for a tour of Pakistan, Hassan informed them that he will be travelling with the team to lend moral support.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Domingo seeking continuity leading into T20 WC

SPORTS REPORTER



With the uncertainty surrounding the possibility of Bangladesh touring Pakistan now put to rest after the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) decided to send the team in three short visits, the cricketers started training for the assignment under head coach Russell Domingo at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

The Tigers are scheduled to travel to Pakistan for the first leg on January 22 and reach Lahore on January 23. The players are expected to practise on the same day before taking part in the first match of the three-match T20I series in Lahore on January 24.

The three-match T20I series will also be the start of the Tigers' road to the ICC T20 World Cup in Australia in October. The selectors have tried quite a few new faces especially in the shortest format of the

game over the past few years but head coach Domingo is now looking for continuity in the T20 squad with the flagship event in mind.

"Depending on how they do [continuity for the players]. If a player is out of his depth, we can't keep going with him. If a player has potential to develop, you have to run with those players. After this series, we have to keep our squad as small as possible. I think we can play with a maximum of 16 or 17 players in the next couple of series," Domingo told reporters yesterday.

Young pacer Hasan Mahmud is the newest face in the Tigers' ranks while the likes of Mahedi Hasan, Afif Hossain, Aminul Islam and Mohammad Naim will also look to establish themselves in the side.

"It will be the first time I will be working with Hasan Mahmud. I have seen some of his performances in the matches and nets of the Emerging Team. It is a young group

of players and shows depth within our system. Hopefully some of these players can make a big play to get into the World Cup squad. It is not finalised yet.

The 45-year-old South African also hinted at some tactical changes in the batting order for the Pakistan tour and informed that it would be the responsibility of the players to adapt to new conditions and positions in the coming days.

"The best players can play under any condition, in any position. If you bat Eion Morgan at number 3 or 6, he is successful. If you bat Kane Williamson at number 3 or 5, he will find a way to do that role. It is a great opportunity for the young players to find new strings to their game. I am excited by it.

"If a guy like Liton [Das] has to bat at number 4 for a game or two, that's fine. If [Mohammad] Mithun has to bat at number 3, that's okay. If Afif [Hossain] has to go from number 6 to opening, he

has to learn to do those things. A guy like Soumya [Sarkar], who batted number 3 in India, may end up batting at number 6 in Pakistan. [Mahmudullah] Riyad may bat at number 5. Afif might come up to 3 or 4. [Nazmul Hossain] Shanto has finished his [BPL] campaign well," he said.

Talking about continuity, Domingo was also banking on Mahmudullah to lead the Tigers in the upcoming T20 World Cup, "I am hoping he leads us in the T20 World Cup. He has my full support. I thought he did a great job in India. I have enjoyed working with him. I think he is a good professional. He has respect in the change room and is a world-class player. He is my captain," he added.

The South African also said that it was not a tough decision for him to travel to Pakistan and also added that playing under tight security will not affect the focus of the players.



**Bangladesh head coach Russel Domingo (L) hopes that players like the young Afif Hossain (R) will make their way through the ranks and cement a place in the national team, possibly through the upcoming T20 series in Pakistan.**

PHOTO: BCB

## Old guard march into new decade

AFP, Melbourne



Old stagers Novak Djokovic and Serena Williams will aim to keep the younger generation of players waiting in the wings as Grand Slam tennis enters a new decade at the Australian Open on Monday.

After recent bushfire smog largely cleared in Melbourne, the view is all too familiar with Djokovic and Williams, who is seeking a record-equalling 24th Major title, installed as the bookies' favourites.

Top seed Rafael Nadal, 33, is celebrating becoming world number one in a third decade while Roger Federer, 38, is trying to defy the ageing process and stay ahead of his rivals with a 21st Grand Slam win.

The start of 2020 is not dissimilar to 2010, when Federer and Nadal shared the four Grand Slam titles and Williams won in Melbourne and Wimbledon.

Ten years later, the men's Big Three -- who have won all but two Australian Open titles since 2004 -- occupy the top three rankings, and Williams is one step away from Margaret Court's record for Grand Slam victories.

The men's dominance is stark: since Federer won his first Grand Slam title in 2003, only five Major finals have not featured one of the Swiss, Nadal or Djokovic.

Several challengers have come and gone but there is increasing hope for the men's up-and-comers, while nine women have won Grand Slam titles since Williams, 38, claimed her 23rd in Melbourne in 2017.

While Djokovic and Nadal split last year's Grand Slams, Dominic Thiem, Daniil Medvedev and Fabio Fognini won their first Masters trophies and Stefanos Tsitsipas, 21, became the youngest ATP Finals champion in 18 years.

"They're very close. I don't think that's miles, miles away maybe as it



**Defending champion Novak Djokovic of Serbia enjoys refreshments during a practice session yesterday, ahead of the Australian Open which is set to get underway in Melbourne today.**

PHOTO: AFP

was some years ago," Djokovic of the NextGen winning a Major title. "I think they are definitely hungry. They're challenging. They're knocking on the door."

The clash between old and new will be epitomised in the first round on Monday, when Venus Williams, who turns 40 this year, plays 15-year-old rising star Coco Gauff -- who wasn't even born when her fellow American lifted her first Grand Slam trophies in 2000.

Japan's Naomi Osaka, 22, is defending a title for the second Grand Slam in a row after her repeat bid at last year's US Open fell flat in the fourth round.

World number one Ashleigh Barty, fresh from winning the Adelaide International on Saturday, carries Australian hopes of seeing the first home-grown women's winner since

1978.

"Obviously it's the perfect preparation. But regardless of whether I won the title or not last week, I feel like I'm well-prepared," Barty said.

"I'm happy, I'm healthy. I'm coming into the first Grand Slam of the year with a smile on my face. That's all I can ask of myself."

The tournament is taking place against the backdrop of a bushfires emergency that has swept the nation and ramped up fears over global warming -- and billowed choking smog across Melbourne and other cities.

After player anger during qualifying and practice, when several were hit by coughing fits and breathing problems, air pollution returned to 'moderate' levels over the weekend, with rain forecast for the start of the tournament.

## Zim dominate Day One

REUTERS, Harare

Opener Kevin Kasuza struck a half-century on debut as Zimbabwe eased to 189 for two at the close on the opening day of the first Test against Sri Lanka in Harare on Sunday.

The Test is Zimbabwe's first since November 2018, when they drew a series 1-1 in Bangladesh, and despite a slow run-rate they laid a platform for a big score.

Craig Ervine (55 not out) and Brendan Taylor (13 not out) will resume on day two, with 84 overs bowled before bad light brought a premature end to the first day.

Kasuza (63) put on 96 for the first wicket with Prince Masvaure (55), who also struck a maiden Test half-century in his third game. Ervine reached that milestone as well and it is the first time in Zimbabwe's Test history that their top three batsmen have past 50 in the same innings.

Masvaure was the first wicket to fall when he was caught by a diving Dimuth Karunaratne at mid-off from the left-arm spin of Lasith Embuldeniya.

Kasuza's 214-ball vigil ended when he played around a full toss from fast bowler Lahiru Kumara and was adjudged lbw. Kasuza is one of three debutants in the side along with seamer Victor Nyauchi and left-arm spinner Ainsley Ndlovu.

The second Test will also be played at the Harare Sports Club starting on Jan. 27.

**SCORES IN BRIEF ZIMBABWE:** First innings 189 for 2 (Kasuza 63, Masvaure 55, Ervine 55 not out; Kumara 1-37)

## Root's four puts Eng on the brink

AFP, Port Elizabeth



England captain Joe Root produced a Test-best bowling performance to send South Africa hurtling towards a humiliating defeat on the fourth day of the third Test at St George's Park on Sunday.

Root took four for 31 as South Africa slumped to 102 for six after being forced to follow on.

They were still 188 runs short of avoiding an innings defeat, with England seemingly assured of taking an unbeatable 2-1 series lead into the final Test starting in Johannesburg on Friday.

They needed only 28 balls to dismiss South Africa's last four batsmen for the addition of a single run at the start of play, with Stuart Broad picking up three wickets without conceding a run to have South Africa all out for 209.

Rain early in South Africa's second innings threatened to thwart England but

fast bowler Mark Wood struck twice when play resumed more than three hours later. Wood used his extreme pace to send Dean Elgar's off stump flying before he had Zubayr Hamza edging a ball outside his leg stump to wicketkeeper Jos Buttler.

Then it was over to Root, who in 90 previous Tests had never taken more than two wickets in an innings. He trapped Pieter Malan leg-before in the last over before tea and added three more wickets after the interval.

Rassie van der Dussen was superbly caught at short leg by Ollie Pope and Quinton de Kock fell to a leaping catch at backward point by Wood. South Africa captain Faf du Plessis was sixth out after making 36.

**SCORES IN BRIEF**

**ENGLAND:** First innings 499 for 9 declared  
**SOUTH AFRICA:** First innings 209 all out (Elgar 35, De Kock 63; Broad 3-30, Bess 5-51) and second innings 102 for 6 (Du Plessis 36; Root 4-31, Wood 2-23)



**The Autism Welfare Foundation's (AWF) annual sports competition was held at the AWF premises in Keraniganj on Saturday. Hafizur Rahman Khan, governing body member of the foundation and chairman of the Runner Group of Companies, inaugurated the competition as chief guest.**

PHOTO: COLLECTED