



Bangladesh head coach Russell Domingo (C) directs his charges during practice at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore yesterday, ahead of today's first T20I against Pakistan.

PHOTO: BCB

A new beginning 12 years later

SAKEB SUBHAN

The three-match T20I series between Bangladesh and Pakistan, starting today in Lahore, may seem like the result of protracted diplomatic negotiations between the two respective cricket boards but with the focus shifting finally to cricket, the series carries greater importance than most recent assignments for Bangladesh.

When Bangladesh last toured Pakistan in 2008, the modern history of the country's cricket had just begun to be written as it was one of the early instances in which the players that carried Bangladesh cricket over the next decade started playing together. 12 years on, it is hard to escape the feeling that the era that was in its infancy in 2008 is drawing to a close.

Today, only Tamim Iqbal and skipper Mahmudullah Riyad remain from that bunch. Other members of the Big 5 are not there -- Mashrafe Bin Mortaza has retired from T20Is, Shakib Al Hasan has been banned for a year for failing to report corrupt approaches from a bookie and Mushfiqur Rahim refused to tour because of security concerns.

Since the World Cup last year, there has been an increasing sense that the nucleus of Bangladesh's decade of growth has been unravelling. With Shakib injured for the ensuing ODI series in Sri Lanka last July and ODI skipper Mashrafe missing out because of a hamstring injury, the World Cup remains the last instance of Bangladesh's five big players playing together.

Before the current tour, Bangladesh coach Russell Domingo said that Mahmudullah was his skipper in T20Is and that as part of a larger trend of continuity leading into the T20 World Cup in October this year, he would want to see Mahmudullah leading in the World Cup too.

With that as backdrop and harbinger, this could be seen as the dawn of a new era for Bangladesh cricket. On the surface the focus will of course be on Tamim and

Mahmudullah to lead with performance and example on and off the field, but the deeper examination will be of those who should by now be looking to form the new nucleus for the next decade.

On this tour, it will be Mushfiqur's absence more than that of Shakib -- who has missed the odd series due to injury and rest over the past two years -- that will test Bangladesh. Over the last two years, Mushfiqur has scored the most runs in ODIs for Bangladesh, been second on the list in T20Is and third in Tests. And that does not take into account the intangible measures like the importance of match-winning innings -- the 35-ball 72 against Sri Lanka in the 2018 Nidahas Trophy and the 43-ball 60 to beat India in November last year are just two of the many instances when Mushfiqur turned matches in Bangladesh's favour.

Therefore, while the writing has been on the wall for a while now, it is this tour

that will test what stuff the likes of Soumya Sarkar, Liton Das, Mohammad Mithun -- three who have been around for a while -- and rookies Afif Hossain, Mohammad Naim, Nazmul Hossain Shanto, Aminul Islam and Mahedi Hasan are made of. Performances in the BPL are commendable, but it remains to be seen how they fare without the security blanket of Mushfiqur holding things together in case of disaster.

Also notable in the squad is the fact that there are no left-arm spinners -- a rarity for the Tigers -- and Bangladesh have gone with a pace-heavy contingent, including promising uncapped pacer Hasan Mahmud.

The message is clear. The vision is towards the T20 World Cup and beyond, which includes an uplift in performances away from home -- the one dissatisfying aspect of the 2010s. By the end of the third match, the picture of Bangladesh's future will have become clearer, for better or worse.



Tamim Iqbal (C) was a youngster when Bangladesh last toured Pakistan in 2008, but during the T20I series the star Bangladesh opener will assume the role of elder statesman in a team well into its transition phase.

PHOTO: BCB

Mahmudullah wants to win series in Pakistan

First T20I starts today

STAR SPORT DESK



Bangladesh T20 captain Mahmudullah Riyad looks forward to putting up a good show against Pakistan, who will seek to hold onto the top spot in T20 world rankings, when the three-match T20I series gets underway today at the Gaddafi Cricket Stadium in Lahore.

If the host team loses just one of the three matches, they will slide to second position, behind England or India in rankings, after holding the top spot since January 2018. Pakistan will also want to show that the security situation has improved enough for the team to start regularly hosting international matches at home.

On the other hand, Mahmudullah said yesterday during the pre-match press conference that they were only focusing on cricket but had not experienced such strict security measures, the likes of which is present in Pakistan at the moment.

"I cannot say whether we are favourites or not but I am hopeful and I think it's an opportunity for us to win a series in Pakistan with the next T20 World Cup coming up," he said responded to a question.

Mahmudullah added that Pakistan are a good team and that their ranking speaks volumes about their quality. He added that his team's 'performance graph is quite good in recent times and hopefully Bangladesh will give Pakistan a good fight. Playing good cricket and beating Pakistan is our only motto'.

Pakistan skipper Babar Azam said Pakistan was under no pressure in the series against Bangladesh, despite the thrashing they received in the last T20

series against Sri Lanka at home in October last year.

"No there is no pressure for us because what is done is done but we will not try to repeat the same mistakes we did against the Lankans," Babar said.

Babar made it clear that they were not taking Bangladesh lightly.

Bangladesh (9) v Pakistan (1) T20I Stats

MATCHES	Overall	In Pakistan
	Played- 10	Played- 1
	Bangladesh won- 2	Bangladesh won- 0
	Pakistan won- 8	Pakistan won- 1

MOST RUNS (TOP THREE)										
For Bangladesh										
Player	Mat	Inns	Runs	Ave	SR	50	100	HS		
Shakib Al Hasan	9	9	292	41.71	127.51	3	0	84		
Tamim Iqbal	9	9	131	14.55	121.29	0	0	24		
Nazimuddin	2	2	123	61.50	125.51	1	0	81		

For Pakistan										
Player	Mat	Inns	Runs	Ave	SR	50	100	HS		
Mohammad Hafeez	8	7	193	27.57	106.04	1	0	64		
Shahid Afridi	10	9	181	20.11	190.52	0	0	49		
Ahmed Shehzad	3	3	180	90.00	136.36	1	1	111*		

MOST WICKETS (TOP THREE)										
For Bangladesh										
Player	Mat	Wkts	Ave	Econ	BBI	4 Wkts	5 Wkts			
Abdur Razzak	7	7	28.00	7.00	2/16	0	0			
Shakib Al Hasan	9	6	37.83	6.30	2/24	0	0			
Arafat Sunny	3	5	18.40	9.20	2/34	0	0			

For Pakistan										
Player	Mat	Wkts	Ave	Econ	BBI	4 Wkts	5 Wkts			
Shahid Afridi	10	10	23.50	6.02	2/26	0	0			
Shoaib Malik	8	6	11.00	6.60	2/27	0	0			
Mohammad Amir	3	6	11.50	5.75	2/16	0	0			

Once we boarded the plane we are only focused on our cricket. Now our main focus is to how we can play good cricket here. We have left all those things (security issues) in Bangladesh. We are looking forward to put up a good show here.

MAHMUDULLAH RIYAD
BANGLADESH T20I CAPTAIN

Bangladesh have a good combination of youngsters and seniors and it will be a good competitive series. Their players have the advantage of having come here fresh out of the BPL (Bangladesh Premier League). The focus is to continue the number one ranking and we can hang on to that only if we win all three matches.

BABAR AZAM
PAKISTAN T20I CAPTAIN



Bangladesh skipper Mahmudullah Riyad (L) and his Pakistani counterpart Babar Azam, who leading the country for the first time during today's T20I encounter, pose with the series trophy in Lahore yesterday.

- Captain Mahmudullah Riyad and opening batsman Tamim Iqbal are the only two cricketers in Bangladesh's 15-man squad who have played in Pakistan before, in 2008.

- These two sides featured in the first T20I on Pakistan soil in April 2008, which the hosts, captained by Shoaib Malik, won convincingly by 102 runs.

- Bangladesh have included one uncapped player in the form of right-arm fast bowler Hasan Mahmud in their squad while Pakistan have called up three uncapped players in Ahsan Ali, Amad Butt and Haris Rauf.

- Both of Bangladesh's T20I victories over Pakistan came at home in 2015 and 2016 by seven and five wickets respectively.

- The last time these two teams faced each other was in 2016 during the ICC Men's World Twenty20 in India. Captained by Shahid Afridi, Pakistan won by 55 runs.

- Babar Azam, currently sitting at No.1 in ICC's T20I batting rankings, will lead Pakistan for the first time in front of his home fans at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore, a venue where he served as a ball-boy in the second Test between Pakistan and South Africa 13 years ago.

BCL from Jan 31

BCB mulling pink-ball final

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) brought forward the date of the Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL), a franchise-based four-day competition that will now start from January 31.

The 50-over Dhaka Premier Cricket League was supposed to be the next domestic competition on the calendar but the board has decided to go ahead with the four-team BCL first with an eye to giving the national players an opportunity for some longer-form match practice ahead of upcoming Test series against Pakistan and Zimbabwe.

With just seven days to go to the scheduled start of the first-class league, the BCB is still formulating plans to use make the final a pink-ball, day-night affair and broadcasting it live.

"I conducted the meeting today in the absence of our tournament committee chairman [Gazi Golam Mortuza]. But we discussed a few issues including whether we can broadcast live at least one match, as it will encourage our young cricketers. We have little time but we will still try to do it," said BCB Director Khaled Mahmud after a tournament committee meeting yesterday.

"We have also discussed playing the final with a pink ball and we will discuss it with players before taking the final decision. Actually, we have little time as we have to arrange the BCL before the Dhaka League because we have a number of Test matches and we don't want to interrupt the Dhaka League, which is the bread and butter for our cricketers," he added.

Prime Bank has already cut their sponsorship ties with BCB, so along with the North Zone team, the board have to operate South Zone this season. Mahmud however said that they would welcome new sponsors if anyone expresses interest within the short period before the BCL's start.

Walton Central Zone and Islami Bank East Zone are the other teams in the competition.

NZ-India first T20I today

AFF, Wellington

New Zealand will be looking to put their Test humiliation in Australia behind them when they switch formats on Friday to start a five-match Twenty20 series against India with the spotlight on Kane Williamson's leadership.

The series launches a six-week tour by Virat Kohli's men with three one-day internationals and two Tests to follow.

However, in a Twenty20 World Cup year it is form in cricket's shortest format that will command considerable attention.

India have just completed a successful three-match ODI series against Australia and Kohli's immediate concern on arriving in New Zealand was the tight schedule his side faced.

"It's definitely getting closer and closer to landing at the stadium straight, that's how compressed the game has come," he said on the eve of the first match in Auckland.

Sri Lanka outplay Zimbabwe

AFF, Harare



Suranga Lakmal took four for 27 to set up Sri Lanka for a 10-wicket win over Zimbabwe in the first Test in Harare on Thursday.

Resuming on 30 without loss and needing 157 to make Sri Lanka bat again, Zimbabwe recovered from the loss of three early wickets to Lakmal to reach lunch at 120 for three.

The tall pace bowler struck again immediately after, removing Brendan Taylor for 38, and Zimbabwe slumped to 170 all out, losing their last seven wickets for 50.

Sri Lanka needed just 14 to win and the openers Oshada Fernando and Dimuth

Karunaratne knocked off the runs in three overs.

Angelo Mathews was named man of the match for his 200 not out in Sri Lanka's first innings of 515 for nine declared.

"I wanted to go for a biggy," said Mathews after the game. "It was very slow going and they gave nothing away with their umbrella field."

SCORES IN BRIEF
ZIMBABWE: First innings 358 and second innings 170 (Williams 39, Taylor 38; Lakmal 4-27, Kumara 3-32, Embuldeniya 2-74)
SRI LANKA: First innings 515 for 9 declared and second innings 14-0.

Result: Sri Lanka won by 10 wickets.

Player-of-the-match: Angelo Mathews.



Pacer Suranga Lakmal's 4-wicket haul powered Sri Lanka to a 10-wicket victory over Zimbabwe on the fifth day of the first Test in Harare yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

BD take on Pak in final group match

SPORT REPORTER



Bangladesh will face off against Pakistan in their last Group C fixture of the ICC U19 World Cup at the JB Marks Oval in Potchefstroom today.

Pakistan's victory over Zimbabwe on Wednesday ensured that both teams would progress to the next round with a match in hand.

However, having won their respective group matches against Zimbabwe and Scotland, the two sides will look to keep their perfect run intact going into the Super League quarterfinal stage.

Hagley Oval to host 2021 Women's Cricket WC final

AFF, Wellington

Next year's Women's Cricket World Cup final will be played at Christchurch's Hagley Oval, it was announced Thursday, underscoring the growth of the game over the past two decades.

When Christchurch previously hosted the women's final in 2000 it was played on a rural ground 20 kilometres (12 miles) from the city.

For the 2021 edition it will be played at an upgraded Hagley Oval, one of New Zealand's principal Test venues, which has recently received approval to erect lights to host night fixtures.