



(ANTI-CLOCKWISE FROM TOP L) The Bangladesh team, including pacer Shoriful Islam, were draped in garlands shortly after landing at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport yesterday before they were escorted the police -- and a cavalcade of motorcycles that the fans brought out -- to the home of cricket in Mirpur. Festivities peaked at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium, where they were accorded a grand reception by the Bangladesh Cricket Board.

From Akram to Akbar Captain Cool's eyes fixed on the future

NABID YEASIN

How had the nation welcomed the Akram Khan-led Bangladesh side that wrote the first glorious chapter in Bangladesh's cricket history when they defeated Kenya and lifted the ICC trophy in 1997? That success story is known to most of this generation just through stories, pictures and articles, best described by those who had witnessed it first-hand.

And given the quality of the photos and videos -- the handful that can be accessed with ease -- it is hard to get the whole picture of the madness that took hold nationwide in 1997. And hence, for most of this generation, it was just left to the imagination.

Rong khela (drenching each other with coloured water) took place in almost every neighbourhood, people rallied on the roads and shouted slogans and chants at the top of their lungs as their heroes, who ensured Bangladesh's first ever appearance in a World Cup (the 1999 edition), were given a grand reception.

Fast forward 23 years and similar madness was created, this time for the Akbar Ali-led Bangladesh U-19s who returned with the nation's first ever World Cup, won when they beat India in the final of the ICC U-19 World Cup in Potchefstroom last Sunday.

However, in these 23 years, Bangladesh have had many moments of success in cricket. Be it the Tigers' first ever Test win against Zimbabwe in 2005, their heroic journey to the semifinal of the ICC Champions trophy in 2017, defeating England in Australia and making it to their first ever World Cup quarterfinal in 2015 or coming as close as 2 runs from being Asian champions in the Asia Cup final in 2012 -- there have been many glorious moments for the fans of a cricket crazy nation.

But none of the teams that created those moments could provide fans with the

ultimate euphoria that the Akram-led side gifted with their 1997 ICC Trophy triumph.

However, while it may be a stretch to compare events so far apart in the cricketing timeline, it can still be said that there were shades of 1997 in the euphoric fans who thronged the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka to welcome the young champions, or the ones that were waiting for their heroes at the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) headquarters in Mirpur.

Even hours before the scheduled time of arrival of the cubs, journalists and media personnel gathered at the airport waiting to get a glance of the nation's first world cup and of the ones who won it. Things got a bit wild too, with security personnel trying to keep things in order and the media personnel trying to be the first to take a picture or record a video that would be watched numerous times in the future.

The BCB officials also started making it to the airport hours before the team's arrival.

There were a number of fans too, shouting and chanting at the top of their voice with banners that read congratulatory messages. Even at a secured VIP lounge of the airport -- where the young Tigers were scheduled to arrive -- there were about a couple of hundred people or more, including media personnel, at the exit gate.

Ending the wait of hundreds, the team landed sometime after 5:00pm. The reporters, photo journalists -- those who could make it through the security guards and huge crowd at the entrance of the VIP lounge -- were the ones to get the first glance of the triumphant team.

The team stayed at the airport for no more than 30-40 minutes as they were welcomed with garlands and bouquets by the BCB officials. They soon left for the BCB headquarters in Mirpur, along with the BCB high-ups, where even a larger crowd was waiting to receive the champions.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED & RASHED SHUMON

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Under-19 captain Akbar Ali's calm demeanour has already been well-documented, especially after his match-winning unbeaten 43-run knock against India in the ICC Under-19 World Cup final. The young man did not get carried away even after all the praise and celebration as the wicketkeeper-batsman kept his cool amid all the festivity upon their return yesterday while talking to the media at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

Akbar said that their success could be considered a stepping stone to greater achievements and will motivate many future cricketers but he once again reminded everyone that bigger challenges await them



Bangladesh Under-19 captain Akbar Ali is all smiles as he heads onto the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

as "there is a huge gap between age-level cricket and international cricket, and international cricket is not that easy".

So, they may celebrate their success for two or three more days before getting back to the serious business of preparing themselves for the next level.

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan announced that they have chalked out a two-year plan for these cricketers and they have decided to give each cricketer Tk 1 lakh per month for the next two years. When Akbar's attention was drawn to this announcement, he was very forthright.

"We would like to thank the board but we had no desire of anything like that; we are satisfied that we were successful in achieving

our goal. Our first target was to play the final and honestly speaking, we didn't have that big a goal [of becoming champions]. But our team management made it clear to us that our professional careers have just started and we need to get ready for the next level. Our main target would be to prepare ourselves to reduce the gap between age-level cricket and international cricket," Akbar explained.

Hassan was excited with the success and termed it the biggest achievement in the country's sports history, but he also put emphasis on future planning so that these heroes can shine further in international cricket.

"It is the biggest achievement in our country's sports history because the World Cup is World Cup. They made us proud. It is easy to get success but tough to maintain it. We have to look forward after this brilliant success. We want them to concentrate only on their cricket. We will give them special training for the next two years to improve their skills. We will review their two-year contract after two years and it will be withdrawn if someone fails to uplift their performance. We want to see them cement their place in the national side after two years," said Hassan.

"The challenge is much bigger now. If youth can do it, why not the senior team? We [the board] may be lacking in some aspects but if we can go ahead with proper planning, it would also be possible for the

HIGHLIGHTS

Instead of handing the World Cup winning Bangladesh Under-19 players with a lump sum, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) decided to include the champion players in a two-year contract, during which period Akbar Ali and Co will be receiving a monthly remuneration of Taka 1 Lakh each.

The BCB president Nazmul Hassan mentioned that the batch of this promising players will be offered with 'specialized training' to help improve their skill during this time.

Nazmul also talked about forming an Under-21 squad -- a special unit aimed to groom the young Tigers. And after two years, board will be extending the contract of the ones who would show development and progress.

senior team," he added.

One of the architects behind the success was former Sri Lanka cricketer Naveed Nawaz, who guided the team as head coach. The essence of Naveed's explanation behind the success was very simple -- good long-term planning that ensured the players' specific roles in the team, and he praised his 'captain cool' wholeheartedly.

Riyad asked to rethink Test future

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh team management have asked all-rounder Mahmudullah Riyad to rethink his future in Test cricket. According to the team management, Mahmudullah was asked to focus on the limited-over formats considering his recent poor form in the longest format.

This had come immediately after Bangladesh's humiliating innings and 44-run defeat against Pakistan in the first match of a two-Test series in Rawalpindi last week.

"We have asked the coach [Russell Domingo] to talk with him about his future in the longer-version cricket and he had spoken with him," said a member of the team manage who wished to remain unnamed.

It was learned that the national selection panel is discussing Mahmudullah's place for Bangladesh's next Test, at home against Zimbabwe later this month.

The 34-year-old cricketer has been in hot water over his recent form in

Test cricket as he has only one-half century -- against New Zealand at Wellington in March 2019 -- in his last 10 innings.

Things went from bad to worse for the Tigers' T20I skipper as he scored 25 in the first innings and a golden duck in the second innings in the Rawalpindi Test, when he was the third wicket of Pakistan youngster Naseem Shah's hattrick.

The question was raised about

Mahmudullah's batting approach in Pakistan as the right-hander awkwardly managed to get a thick edge to the hattrick ball, which was travelling wide of the off stump.

Mahmudullah, who also led Bangladesh in Tests, played 49 Tests since 2009 and scored 2764 runs at an average of 31.77, with 16 fifties and four centuries, three of which have come between November 2018 and February 2019.



Nepal bundle USA out for record 35

AFF, Kathmandu

The United States were bowled out for 35 by Nepal on Wednesday and joined Zimbabwe in making the lowest total in a 50 over international.

Nepal leg-spinner Sandeep Lamichhane was wrecker-in-chief, taking six for 16 as the American side were finished off in 12 overs in the World Cup league two match in Kathmandu.

West Indies-born opener Xavier Marshall was the only US batsman to get into double figures, making 16. Spinner Sushan Bhari took the other four wickets for just five runs.

Nepal, playing their first international series on home soil, reached the target in just 5.2 overs after losing both their openers in the second over.

Timil Patel hit a four, a six and a four of straight balls to complete the rout by eight wickets.

Zimbabwe were also bowled out for 35 by Sri Lanka in 2004 at Harare.

The US were awarded ODI status last year after taking part in a World Cricket League Division Two event in Namibia. Nepal, the United States and Oman are taking part in the series in Kathmandu.

'Cricket is not about abusing the opponent'

STAR SPORTS DESK



Former Indian greats Kapil Dev and Mohammad Azharuddin were left disappointed by the scenes at the Senwes Park in Potchefstroom on Sunday after Bangladesh and India U-19 players were involved in verbal exchanges following the Bangladesh U-19s' World Cup final three-wicket win in a rain-affected game.

"I would like to see the board (BCCI) take some strict action against the players to set an example. Cricket is not about abusing the opponent. I am sure there is enough reason for these youngsters to be dealt with firmly by BCCI," Kapil was quoted as saying by The Hindu.

"I welcome aggression, nothing wrong in it. But it has to be controlled aggression. You can't cross the line of decency in the name of being competitive. I would say it was unacceptable that youngsters put up such an obnoxious display on the cricket field," he added.

Bangladesh laid down the marker for aggression and India

were in the back foot early on. Kapil welcomed aggression but did not want anyone crossing the line of decency. "I welcome aggression, nothing wrong in it. But it has to be controlled aggression. You can't cross the line of decency in the name of being competitive. I would say it was unacceptable that youngsters put up such an obnoxious display on the cricket field," he added.

Azharuddin also reiterated what Kapil said, insisting that players need to be disciplined.

"I would take action against the errant Under-19 players, but I also want to know what role has the support staff played in educating these youngsters. Act now before it is too late. The players have to be disciplined," Azharuddin said.

Earlier, Bishan Singh Bedi has lashed out at the Priyam Garg-led team, saying their behaviour was disgusting and disgraceful.

"You bat, bowl and field badly... happens, but there's no excuse for behaving badly. The behaviour was disgusting and most disgraceful. The innocence of that age was not visible at all," Bedi told Mid Day.