



Bangladesh's U-19 World Cup winning captain Akbar Ali (Top left), batsman Shahdat Hossain (Top right), pacer Shoriful Islam (Centre), Hasan Murad (Left bottom) and Tanzim Hasan Sakib (Right bottom) were received by adoring crowds and family members upon their return to respective home districts following their triumph.

PHOTO: KONGKON KARMAKER, RAJIB RAIHAN, MOHAMMAD ALI JINNAT, SHEIKH NASIR AND QUAMRUL ISLAM RUBAIYAT.

Heroic welcome as young Tigers go home

SPORTS REPORTER

Players of the victorious Bangladesh Under-19 side, who won the Under-19 World Cup in South Africa, were received in festive fashion by people in their respective localities.

Akbar Ali and his troops left the BCB headquarters in Mirpur -- where they were given a grand reception on Wednesday after their return to the country -- and arrived at their respective hometowns yesterday. And the reception they received even in their locality was made memorable by the locals.

According to a report from our Dinajpur correspondent, the World Cup-winning skipper reached his hometown Rangpur in grand style. The wicketkeeper-batsman who landed at the Saidpur Airport at 12:30 pm, from where he was carried by a convoy of hundreds of motorcycles, jeeps, cars and microbuses



to his hometown Rangpur.

Hundreds of people carrying flowers, festoons, banners and puppets of Tigers were gathered at the Public Library Ground, where a stage was set to welcome their hero. Chants like 'Akbar is great'

came from the crowd as the champion skipper made his way to the stage.

Pacer Shoriful Islam also got a warm welcome when he arrived at his village Moumari in Panchagarh. After reaching the Saidpur Airport at noon he was

received by his family members and started for his village via a microbus. The pacer, whose aggression during the young Tigers' final against India caught everyone's eyes, was however very humble yesterday.

The left-handed seamer however got down from the microbus about a kilometre away from home as he opted to walk the rest of the way along with hundreds of his fans, who chanted 'our pride Shoriful' on their way to his home. It was a festive occasion for the locals as they celebrated receiving their champion player with music.

Meanwhile, Hasan Murad was also welcomed with garlands and flowers when the left-arm spinner reached Cox's Bazar airport at 4:00pm yesterday, as informed by our local correspondent. The Cox's Bazar District Administration received Murad at the airport from where he, like Akbar, was taken to his home through a motorcade.



Tigers given option to sit out

BCL third round begins today

SPORTS REPORTER

For the past week, all the media attention was grabbed by the Akbar Ali-led team that brought home the nation's first ever World Cup, which they won by defeating their Indian counterparts in a thrilling ICC Under-19 World Cup final in Potchefstroom last Sunday.

The champions have left for their hometowns and the focus now returns to the Bangladesh national side, whose recent performances have become a grave concern for the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB).

The Tigers returned early this week after an abysmal showing in Pakistan. The Momintul Haque-led side recorded their sixth consecutive Test defeat when they succumbed to a thumping innings and 44-run defeat against Pakistan during their first World Test Championship fixture of the three-phased tour of the country.

However, most of the side that played in the Pakistan Test, were not included in the squads for the third and final round of the Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) which is scheduled to

begin in Cox's Bazar today.

The next assignment for Bangladesh is a home series against Zimbabwe that includes a lone Test, three ODIs and two T20Is respectively starting from February 22 before the Tigers leave for the third phase of the Pakistan tour in April. And keeping in mind the busy schedule, BCB opted to give the four fast bowlers who were in the Test squad -- Abu Jayed, Ebadot Hossain, Al-Amin Hossain and Rubel Hossain -- a rest while giving the batsmen the option to sit the round out.

"Most players [who played in the Pakistan Test] were given choices by the board about whether they want to play [BCL third round]. It was actually decided that the fast bowlers will rest and the batsmen were given a choice. The camp [for Zimbabwe series] starts on February 18 and the BCL will end on 17. So, the gap in between is very little," explained national selector Habibul Bashir yesterday.

The final round of the first-class tournament will see East Zone battle it out against North Zone at the Sheikh Kamal International Cricket Stadium while at the Academy Ground of the same venue, table-toppers South Zone

will square off against Central Zone.

Only three players -- Saif Hassan, Nazmul Hossain Shanto and Nayeem Hasan -- who were in the squad that played in Pakistan will be playing in the final round of BCL.

Soumya Sarkar, however, has a different reason for missing the BCL. The left-armed will be getting married this month and will be unavailable till February 29.

Mushfiqur Rahim, who opted out of the Pakistan Test, is however expected to play for North Zone today. It was earlier reported that Mushfiqur might be dropped from the Zimbabwe Test. However, Bashir informed yesterday that the stalwart is playing the BCL as he has not played the Pakistan Test and was an automatic pick for his BCL side.

The former national skipper also informed that the situation about Mahmudullah will be cleared in two or three days' time. It was earlier learned that Bangladesh coach Russell Domingo will be having a conversation with Mahmudullah, who has been undergoing a lean patch in the longer formats recently, and would be asked to rethink his future in Test cricket.



"A lot of sacrifices are attached to the process to shape up the likes of Akbar [Ali], [Tanzid Hasan] Tamim, [Parves Hossain] Emon, Rakibul [Hasan] and Shoriful [Islam]. Avishek [Das] returned home after making the country proud. He returned home after making the people of Narail proud. Go forward unconstrained and take the country to new heights. Tuhin kaka, Shanjib Bishwas Shaju, Imrul, I thank you. Because of your contributions, everyone can dream. In my eyes you are the unsung hero of the nation. Trust me -- I mean it." ODI captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza lauding the efforts of the local coaches in Narail who contributed to the growth of the U-19 cricketers in a Facebook post from his personal account.



Bangladesh ODI captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza leaving the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium following practice yesterday. The Tigers are gearing up for the upcoming ODI series against touring Zimbabwe next month under Mashrafe's leadership.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

'Cricket belongs to everyone'

AGENCIES, LAHORE

Kumar Sangakkara, the MCC president and captain of its 12-man squad on a week-long tour of Pakistan, believes in actions more than words, which is why he's in the country to ensure Pakistan is back on the cricketing map.

Addressing a press conference on Thursday he said it had been 47 years since the club last visited Pakistan and 10 years for him personally.

"Cricket belongs to everyone, but for the players to have that platform and display their skills you need to have that support," Sangakkara said in Lahore. "The fact is that you need to have an



underpinning of youth who can be inspired to take up the game. "So if there is no home cricket for a very long period of time, there is a danger that sometime that kind of hunger might go away. The more cricket that you

play here at home, the more times young children and the fabulous fans of Pakistan can see their side, their players play in front of them, within almost touching distance."

Sangakkara, who took over the charge as MCC president in October 2019, further said it's difficult to put into words what a strong Pakistan brings to world cricket, and how it's important to hammer home the message that touring Pakistan is now safe.

"Rather than a direct message by saying something to them, the best thing that we can do is send that message by the way we play in the field," Sangakkara said.

REUTERS, Melbourne



Steve Smith and David Warner will be ready for whatever South African crowds throw at them when the Australia batsmen return to the nation two years after the ball-tampering scandal, paceman Josh Hazlewood has said.

The pair will fly out with the Australia squad on Friday for a limited overs tour in the duo's first visit to the country since serving 12-month bans for their parts in the tampering plot during the Cape Town Test.

The pair were jeered relentlessly by English crowds during last year's one-day World Cup and the following Ashes series, and Hazlewood said they would be unfazed by more hostility.

"Steve and Dave have ticked off pretty much every box since coming back," Hazlewood told reporters in Sydney on Thursday.

"It's just another one of those and I don't think it'll faze them one bit.

"They probably play better when it's like this.

"It's nothing we haven't experienced before ... we'll be fine."

Both Smith and Warner have thrived since returning to the national fold after their bans expired last March.

Smith played a leading role in Australia's retention of the Ashes while Warner was awarded the Allan Border Medal for the third time on Monday as the country's top cricketer in 2019.

Local media have reported that the head

of the national players' union will tour with the side in South Africa to offer extra support for the players.

Hazlewood said Smith and Warner would not need to be shielded.

"They'll probably try to take as much heat as they can actually, try to keep the young guys out of the spotlight," added the paceman.

Hazlewood said engaging positively with fans was the best way to defuse them.

"Join in and try to have a good time with them. Often when you do that, they end up being on your side after a couple of overs," he said.

"It is when you fight them that it becomes to and fro, and quite abusive. Ride the storm and go along with it."

'Ride the storm and go along with it'