



Nearing the end of his reign as Bangladesh's most successful ODI captain, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza was once again seen holding court, as he has done so often in the past, during Bangladesh's practice session at the Sylhet International Stadium yesterday. The Tigers' three-match ODI series against Zimbabwe starts from tomorrow.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Multiple pace units share same hunger

MAZHAR UDDIN from Sylhet



Abu Jayed, arguably the most successful and consistent seamer in the Bangladesh Test side in recent times, was seen bowling in the nets at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday.

The Tigers are scheduled to play a three-match ODI series against Zimbabwe in the northeastern city starting from tomorrow but hometown boy Jayed, who scalped four wickets in the lone Test against Zimbabwe recently, is not part of the ODI set-up and will enjoy a well-deserved break.

Things have started to change in tune with the Tigers' thought process of developing a good cricketing culture and perhaps the BCB is heading in that direction by preparing separate fast bowling units across formats.

The ODI side has a totally different fast-

message to all the pacers in the side.

Although the left-armed is one of the successful bowlers in the shorter formats, Mustafizur still had to prove his worth and perform to cement a place in the shorter-format teams, something that helped promote healthy competition among fast bowlers.

Head coach Russell Domingo had previously stated that he really missed the variety that Saifuddin brought to the bowling attack. Although he is now fit, Saifuddin -- whose last ODI was against Pakistan in the World Cup last year -- will have to prove his worth again after returning to the national team for the first time since injuring his back.

"So far, I have played 33 international games and I can say I got some success. I will be making a comeback after five months [since playing a T20I against Afghanistan in September last year] and I feel everything anew now. As long as you

Spotlight on Mashrafe

SPORTS REPORTER from Sylhet



Cameras were trying to capture every possible frame of Bangladesh ODI captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza from the beginning of yesterday's training session as the iconic cricketer returned to the national fold for the first time since the World Cup in July last year.

Mashrafe reached Sylhet on Friday afternoon, along with opener Tamim Iqbal, and attended the first training session at the Sylhet International Stadium ahead of the three-match ODI series against Zimbabwe, which is scheduled to begin on Sunday.

The 36-year-old had to sit out the tour to Sri Lanka after the World Cup last year at the eleventh hour and the Member of Parliament has since been detached from the national fold.

There was a sense of a homecoming for Bangladesh's most successful captain during the training session and the lively character was seen in his element as he pranked teammates

and even had an amusing argument with Tamim over field placements.

After warming up with a few half-hearted deliveries, Mashrafe cranked up the intensity and bowled a brilliant yorker to Nazmul Hossain Shanto, who was caught off-guard and somehow managed to move his feet away and survive.

Following a long session with the ball, Mashrafe took to the table in the corner of the batting nets for a discussion with head coach Russell Domingo.

Mashrafe has come into the series after Bangladesh Cricket Board President Nazmul Hassan had strongly hinted that the series against Zimbabwe would be the cricketer's last as captain. The BCB boss also cast Mashrafe's international future into 'uncertainty', saying the veteran would have to be subject to the selection process and earn future spots in the team through performances.

According to Hassan, the board is looking to name a new captain in a month's time, which

suggests the side will see a new leader taking charge for the one-off ODI against Pakistan in April.

Questions about Mashrafe's place in the team were raised when Bangladesh finished eighth in the 10-team World Cup and the 36-year-old picked just a solitary wicket in eight games.

However, Mashrafe said that he wanted to continue playing and did not give any hints over when he would retire from international cricket. He added that if the selectors did not consider his performances up to the mark, they could always find alternatives.

Mashrafe overlooked everything, from the BCB's attempt to arrange a grand send-off by arranging an ODI series at home, to the public sentiment on social media that time had come for him to retire.

Nobody can predict what is in store for Mashrafe, but the three-match ODI series against Zimbabwe will surely see the spotlight on Bangladesh's captain fantastic -- perhaps one last time.



Pace-bowling options for the Bangladesh team seem to be in abundance as the likes of Al-Amin Hossain (L), Mohammad Saifuddin and Shafiqul Islam -- none of whom played a part in the lone Test against Zimbabwe -- were included for the ODI series against the African nation.

PHOTO: STAR

Anything can happen: Chibhabha

SPORTS REPORTER from Sylhet



A huge task awaits Zimbabwe's newly-appointed limited-overs captain Chamu Chibhabha as his side desperately look to break their 13-match losing streak to Bangladesh when the three-match ODI series starts in Sylhet tomorrow.

Zimbabwe have not won an ODI against Bangladesh in the past seven years but the new skipper, with five changes to the team that played the one-off Test in Mirpur last week, is focused on breaking the jinx.

"Anything can happen. Whoever shows up on the day and plays best cricket has got a better chance of winning the game. Whoever does the basics better on the day," Chibhabha said at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday.

The 33-year-old, who has played a large part of his 103 ODIs since debuting in 2005 against



Zimbabwe players go through their fielding drills at the Sylhet International Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh, believes that their knowledge of the opposition and conditions will help them snatch a win.

"I have personally played a lot against Bangladesh, even before I started playing international cricket. I played against Shakib [Al Hasan] and Mushfiqur [Rahim] before they represented Bangladesh. Bangladesh has been like our second home and we are excited to be here. It's always nice to be here. Hopefully we can put up some good performances and win some games," the top-order batsman said.

Zimbabwe came into the series on the back of a Test defeat against Bangladesh. The visitors lost by an innings and 106 runs in the match that yielded a result inside four days at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium last week.

Returning Test captain Sean Williams, who missed the one-off Test to attend the birth of his child, will add strength to the Zimbabwe side.

bowling attack to the one in Tests, with the shorter-format featuring the likes of Al Amin Hossain, Mustafizur Rahman, Shafiqul Islam, seam-bowling all-rounder Mohammad Saifuddin and skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza.

There was a time when selectors would tend to include players who had performed well in a different format, often seemingly misusing players by giving them unfamiliar roles in the shorter formats.

But now, even Mustafizur -- who had emerged as a sensation at the beginning of his career -- had to wait for his opportunity. Recognising that he needed to develop his skills for Test cricket, the 24-year-old was left out of the playing eleven in the Test against Zimbabwe, which sent a particular

keep performing, you will be in the team. Otherwise, you lose your place. If I get an opportunity on Sunday, I will have to start afresh, whether batting or bowling," Saifuddin told reporters in Sylhet yesterday.

There are other pacers such as Taskin Ahmed and Ebadot Hossain in the Test squad alongside Khaled Ahmed, who was also seen bowling in the nets yesterday. These players are all trying to improve their skills and the hunger to perform and deliver for the team has started to develop in the Tigers' pace-bowling camp.

It is important that the team management provide assurances and bolster the confidence of this bunch of fast bowlers if the Tigers are to find success in the coming days.

Do or die for Tigresses

T20 WC game against New Zealand today

SPORTS REPORTER



For the Salma Khatun-led Bangladesh women's T20I side, it will be a must-win game when they take on their New Zealand counterparts in the ICC Women's T20 World Cup at the Junction Oval in Melbourne today. It will also be the first T20I match between the two sides.

The Tigresses are yet to secure a victory in the mega event. And even if they manage to get the better of New Zealand today, Bangladesh's qualification to the semifinal will still depend on factors beyond their control.

After losing their tournament opener to India by 18 runs, the Tigresses suffered an 86-run thumping -- their largest ever defeat in T20Is -- at the hands of defending champions Australia on Thursday. The heavy defeat to Australia also saw the Tigresses languishing at the bottom of the points table with a net run rate of -2.6.

Due to such a blow to the net run rate, Bangladesh will need to secure a big-margin win in today's game and also in their final group stage match against Sri Lanka on March 2 to keep their slim hope of going through to the semifinal alive.

Even if the Tigresses achieve the unlikely feats, they will have to depend on the results of other matches to become the second team after India from Group A to qualify for the semifinal. For Bangladesh to qualify, New Zealand would need to win their final group stage match against Australia, which would bring the net run-rate into the equation Bangladesh, Australia and New Zealand's would each have four points.

'My decision won't change'

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh's Mushfiqur Rahim made it clear in an interview aired on Thursday evening that he would stay true to his initial decision of not travelling to Pakistan due to security concerns.

"I had already made my stance clear on whether I will go to Pakistan or not and they [Bangladesh Cricket Board] had accepted it. There was an offer from PSL [Pakistan Super League] and I could have submitted my name there.

"I did not give my name there [PSL] either, so they [BCB] should respect that. Things are pretty clear and it won't change in the future. I only have good wishes for those who will travel," Mushfiqur was quoted as saying on NTV on Thursday.

The BCB had previously stated, in January, that it would respect the players' decision if anyone wanted to opt out of the Pakistan series. Mushfiqur cited family concerns on security-related issues and opted out of the tour. Following Bangladesh's T20I series loss and the loss in the first Test in the first two phases of the tour, the tone of BCB President Nazmul Hassan changed significantly.

"Will have to think for the country. Don't always have to think about your own [welfare]. This is what I personally believe. Family is very important, but

the country is even more important," he said on Wednesday.

"[His] family member went there and played. So would nothing happen if something happened to

[Mahmudllah] Riyad [his brother-in-law]? Will the family members cry only if something happens to him there and played. So would nothing happen if something happened to [Mushfiqur]? I can't believe such things," Hassan had proclaimed.



Bangladesh wicketkeeper-batsman Mushfiqur Rahim, who had opted out of the Pakistan series due to security concerns, remained adamant about not wanting to travel to the country for the final phase of the tour.

PHOTO: STAR

SA, Eng keep hopes alive

AGENCIES, Canberra



South Africa crushed Thailand by a record margin to inch closer to the semifinals of the Women's Twenty20 World Cup, while England also remained on course by beating Pakistan in another Group B match on Friday.

South Africa clubbed the highest total to crush minnows Thailand by a massive 113 runs.

Skipper Dane Van Niekerk won the toss in Canberra and opted to bat, with her team building 195 for three, anchored by powerful opener Lizelle Lee's 101.

It was the biggest score in the tournament's history, beating India's 194 for five against New Zealand in Providence in 2018.

In reply, Thailand were all out for 82 with South Africa bagging a hat-trick off Shabnim Ismail's bowling, although one was a run-out.

"The box we wanted to tick today was to take the win," said Van Niekerk. "Credit to Lizelle for that century... but I think our fielding let us down a little bit today."

The Proteas registered a commanding victory over England in their opening game and by thrashing Thailand, have two wins from two to be well-placed in Group A.

England were clinical in their 42-run victory against Pakistan with skipper Heather Knight once again leading by example.

Knight followed her century against Thailand with a belligerent 62 to help the 2009 champions to a strong 158-7. Like in that match, Natalie Sciver shared the scoring responsibility with her captain smashing a breezy 36.

Pakistan could not build significant partnerships and were all out for 116 in the final over despite Aliya Riaz's defiant 41.

Quick Anya Shrubsole (3-25) and leg-spinner Sarah Glenn (3-15) shared six wickets between them.