

Anxious hours for a few

SPORTS REPORTER

Few changes are on the cards when the national selectors meet today to decide the 15-member Bangladesh squad for next month's one-day international series in Zimbabwe.

Habibul Bashar's men will leave Dhaka on January 31 to play four one-dayers on February 4, 6, 9 and 10 in Harare as part of their March-April World Cup preparation.

The long-serving wicket-keeper Khaled Mashud's fate will definitely be a major issue in the discussion; not only for his poor batting form but also the injury he has suffered during a recent Premier Division Cricket League match, which has sidelined the veteran for the last three games.

It was learnt that the former national skipper was fit for batting but it will take more time for him to be in shape for standing behind the stumps.

Mashud, who has been considered as an automatic choice for long, has already come under the scanner for his fragile batting in recent times, and by drafting Mushfiqur Rahim into the national fold the selectors have already expressed their intention of looking for a replacement for the key position.

Ahead of the World Cup, the Faruque Ahmed-led panel was also looking for a third opener and two new players -- Tamim Iqbal and Zunaed Siddique -- have already come under the spotlight for their big-hitting ability, a far cry from the former pairing of Javed Omar and Rajin Saleh.

Mehrab Hossain has had some good partnerships in the last few games with the national team but his slow batting is of real concern for the think-tank and a crucial reason to opt for a big-hitter up the order. Many however feel that it's too early to think about Zunaed, whose fielding and running-between-the-wickets are still far from the required standard.

There is a bright chance for Mohammad Sharif to make a comeback in the national team after a three-year hiatus due to

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CROUCH LOWER: Victoria opener Imrul Kayes tries to sweep the ball on a dodgy Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium wicket during their Kai-Altech Premier League encounter against Sonargaon yesterday.

Victoria stop Sonargaon

Mirpur pitch under question

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Sonargaon Cricketers tasted their first defeat in the Kai-Altech Premier Cricket League when they crashed to Victoria Sporting Club by six wickets in a low-scoring match at the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

The match lasted one session with last year's runners-up Sonargaon, after four wins in a row, were shot out for 83 in 24.5 overs. Victoria overhauled the target in 26.2 overs losing four wickets, the win paving Abahani's way to enjoy solo lead in the table with an all-win record after five rounds.

Paceman Waskurun Ahmed and Nazmul Hossain Milon exploited the condition most by sharing six wickets between them to tear apart the star-studded Sonargaon batting line-up that included the likes of Al-Shahriar, Alok Kapali and Mohammad Ashraf.

Left-handed opener Imrul Kayes then smashed a 50-ball 43 with help of five boundaries and two sixes to take Victoria safely to 85-4 for their third victory.

The outcome of the match, however, raised questions whether the newly prepared pitch is the reason behind several low-scoring affairs at cricket's new home or

should the batsmen be blamed for failing to adopt to the situation.

"I think it is unfair to arrange domestic matches on this kind of wicket when the clubs are spending a lot of money. I am not ready to blame my batsmen for the batting debacle," said Sonargaon captain and ace Bangladesh batsman Mohammad Ashraf, who was dismissed for a golden duck. He, however, did not justify his decision to bat first on a foggy morning.

Chief selector Faruque Ahmed, who watched the match his colleagues of the selection panel including coach Dav Whatmore, also believes that there is 'food for thought' for the organisers about the behaviour of the wicket.

"I think the pitch should be a concern when all the matches played here have been low-scoring. I think the authority can offer a delayed start to avoid the early morning fog, which actually played a big part in the game," Faruque observed.

"It is not easy to bat on such kind of low-bounce pitch, especially early in the morning but the basic thing is that it's a newly laid pitch and it will take some time to get better."

The venue has already hosted international matches but the authority has been using new pitches for the Premier league matches with 177 being the highest score so far, made by Victoria won by six wickets.

Mohammedan against Victoria.

Curator Badiul Alam was not ready to accept that the pitches are to blame.

"It was just the second match played at this pitch. I agree that there was low bounce but no way unplayable. The batsmen should adopt. Most of them were caught behind while chasing deliveries outside the off-stump," Alam commented.

"We have to arrange matches on new pitches if we want to fully develop one. I think it would be ultimately helpful for the batsmen if they consistently played here."

But the big question is whether it would be wise to arrange a big match like Abahani-Mohammedan here and risk another frustrating show whatever explanation the experts offer. The traditional foes are set to clash on January 28.

SCORES IN BRIEF

SONARGAON: 83 all out in 24.5 overs (Al-Shahriar 20, Mehrab 3, Kapali 2, Jayantha 15, Ashraf 0, Ayub 0, Ashiqur 13, Dhirman 0, Sharif 1, Rafique 2, Mahbubul 8 not out, extras 19, Shuvro 2-29, Waskurni 3-33, Milon 3-12, Jaffer 1-2).

VICTORIA: 85-4 in 26.2 overs (Imrul 43, Faruque 21, Mustakim 5, Riyad 0, Mushfiqur 2 n.o., Hasanuzzaman 6 n.o., extras 8, Rafique 1-23, Jayantha 3-3).

Result: Victoria won by six wickets.

Mohammedan keep the chase

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Mohammedan Sporting Club shrugged off a challenge by Young Pegasus to stay on leaders Abahani's heels in the Kai-Altech Premier Cricket League yesterday but Bangladesh Biman further slumped when they were caught napping by another bottom-half side Partex.

Mohammedan's 16-run win at the Fatullah Stadium was the title aspirants' fourth in five rounds which placed them level with Sonargaon on eight points, two adrift of archrivals Abahani.

Abahani suffered their second successive loss after beating Mohammedan and third defeat overall to climb down to fifth place with four points.

MOHAMMEDAN-PEGASUS

Mohammedan put on a frustrating show after electing to bat on a batting-friendly strip as they were all out against a moderate attack for 215.

Fresh from a match winning four-wicket haul in the last round against Brothers, Pegasus captain Lal Mohon ripped through the rival tail grabbing five wickets for 33.

The off-spinner dismissed Mohammedan's two top scorers, Faisal Hossain (47 off 58 balls) and skipper Habibul Bashar (37 off 75 balls) in his 7.2 overs and also contributed 27 runs in his side's reply of 199.

The fate of the match was evenly balanced after Pegasus recovered from a precarious 80-5 but man-of-the-match Tapash Baisya (4-44 from 9.4 overs) tamed Raisul Islam (41 off 50 balls) and Saif Mahmud (27) who threatened to turn the tide at one stage.

BIMAN-PARTEX

At BKSP, left-arm pacer Rezaul Haque claimed five wickets to inspire newcomers Partex to a five-wicket win over Biman. The first-change bowler ran havoc in a star-studded batting line after Mohammad Azim hit the inroads with the new ball by removing openers Raquib Hasan and Javed Omar.

Rezaul, named man-of-the-

match, finished ten overs with 5-17 to fold the Biman innings for 134. In reply, Partex reached 138-5 with more than seven overs to spare.

Partex also lost four players below the double-figure but captain Rajin Saleh, who opened the innings, held the fort with a sedate 51 off 123 balls before Pakistani all-rounder Rashed Hanif gave finishing touch with a brash 48 not out off just 50 deliveries.

SCORES IN BRIEF

MOHAMMEDAN: 215 all out in 47.2 overs (Imtiaz 17, Junaid 33, Aftab 4, Sakib 29, Bashar 37, Faisal 47, Sahigir 21, Tapash 4, Arafat 9 n.o., Hasibul 1, Manjurul 0, extras 13, Delwar 1-50, Saif 2-47, Maruf 1-32, Sharif 1-32, Lal Mohon 5-33).

PEGASUS: 199 all out in 47.4 overs (Rabiu 3, Jubair 10, Lal Mohon 27, Maruf 14, Iftekhar 12, Sharif 27, Saif 29, Raisul 41, Moniruzzaman 1, Delwar 17, Mortaza 3 n.o., extras 15, Manjurul 2-39, Tapash 4-44, Sakib 1-31, Hasibul 1-37, Arafat 1-35).

Result: Mohammedan won by 16 runs.

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Women's meet starts on Jan 27

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Dhaka will take on Ansar in the opening match of the first ever women's cricket championship to be held at the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium on January 27.

An opening ceremony is also slated to take place on the day.

Apart from the two teams mentioned above, eight other teams are also taking part in the tournament. Ten teams have been split into two groups, with the top two qualifying to the semi-finals.

Six venues in all will host matches, with Gulshan Youth and Nabin Shangha grounds hosting the two semi-finals.

The final and closing ceremony will also take place at the Mirpur's home of cricket.

Group A -- Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Ansar, Narayanganj.

Group B -- Bholai, Rajshahi, Jahangirnagar University, Bogra, Rangamati.

Kyre, Max move on

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Chritopher and Kyre kept the Indian flag waving as they moved to the third round of the fifth BKSP International Junior Tennis Championships at the BKSP venue yesterday.

Among the boys' winners in the second round, British tyro Max, Kim and Jeong Han of Korea moved to the next round. Christopher beat countryman Navinder 7-5, 6-2 while in the women's singles event, Kyre crushed Moolman 6-0, 6-0. Nigora, Jessica and Vellar also won their respective matches on the day.

HC rules for DD

CRICINFO, undated

The Delhi High Court on Tuesday provided some relief for millions of fans by ruling that public broadcaster Doordarshan (DD) can telecast the remaining three one-dayers between India and West Indies, and one match of the upcoming ODI series against Sri Lanka, as a seven-minute delayed feed. However, All India Radio, also government-owned, will be allowed to broadcast the matches live.

On January 21, millions of viewers across India were denied access to the first ODI between India and the West Indies in Nagpur as DD and Nimbus failed to reach an agreement.

Nimbus, who hold the telecast rights, had given DD two options: that they would either provide the latter live feed of the matches if they encrypt signals, or they could go in for a 15-minute delayed feed. DD, on their part were banking on their prerogative as a public broadcaster, especially the Indian government's uplinking guidelines

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Venues must be ready by Feb 5 B. League committee when?

Football

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After a positive session with Muktijoddha Sangsads footballers, the B. League officials will visit the other professional clubs to enlighten the players about the pros and cons of the new competition.

It was not in the plan originally but two BFF officials had a session with Muktijoddha players on request of the club yesterday.

Professional League manager Abu Nayeem Shohag and Communications manager Sayeed Al Fatah answered to players' queries about their contracts, dues and responsibilities, code of con-

duct and other related subjects ahead of the B. League which is due to start on February 15.

"We had a two-hour session and it looked helpful for the players because they were not aware of many things. Although they had been given the copies of code of conducts and contracts before signing, face-to-face contact seemed to be more useful," opined Shohag.

"After this successful effort, we are looking forward to visit the other clubs if they want such sessions. We have already got positive response from the clubs outside the capital and soon chalk out a plan to meet them as well as the Dhaka teams."

Shohag informed that the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) will

conduct a daylong seminar on event management on February 7.

Meanwhile, the BFF has also asked the venues to complete the necessary renovation works by February 5.

"We have recommended areas of work on the reports submitted by our committee. We will have another visit on February 6 or 7 to see the progress," the Pro League manager added.

Out of four venues, only the Bangabandhu National Stadium seems to be in playable condition and Khulna at its worst.

The Khulna Stadium, home of local Abahani, has the entire southern section of its gallery abandoned for a long time. It also needs

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Left-arm spinner Daniel Vettori (L) of New Zealand is pleased after dismissing England batsman Paul Collingwood in their Commonwealth Bank series game against England in Adelaide on Tuesday.

Kiwis off the mark

Cricket

AFP, Adelaide

Pace bowler James Franklin went from villain to hero as New Zealand kept their triangular series hopes alive with a 90-run win over England at the Adelaide Oval here on Tuesday.

Black Caps did not look to have enough on the board when dismissed for 210 after winning the toss and electing to bat, but bowled and fielded exceptionally well to restrict England to an embarrassing 120 in reply.

Importantly, the Kiwis claimed a bonus point for their first win of the series and moved ahead of England on the tri-series table.

New Zealand were inspired by an incisive opening spell by

Franklin (3-17), and some typically clever bowling by cagey spinner Daniel Vettori (4-24) later in the England innings.

Black Caps captain Stephen Fleming was confident of defending the total, but conceded the bonus point was unexpected.

"It was totally unexpected really, it wasn't until about seven or eight down we realised we had a chance for that," he said.

"It was touch and go half way through, but we were always confident."

"It is nice to put something in the cupboard."

England captain Andrew Flintoff was understandably disappointed with his side's batting.

"We bowled well and we didn't do ourselves justice in our innings," he said.

"We are not quite firing with the

New Zealand bowled well, but we can play a hell of a lot better."

Franklin arguably cost his side an upset win over Australia on Sunday when he dropped a simple catch, but put his side on the path to victory with a three-wicket opening spell.

After Kiwi all-rounder Jacob Oram celebrated his return from a hamstring injury by making a bold 86 to enable his side to recover from 5-67 and make a competitive total, Franklin struck three key blows to remove England's top three.

With Shane Bond (2-32) bowling at high pace at the other end, the left-lander overcame the disappointment of having a caught behind appeal incorrectly turned down to remove openers Mal Loyer (8) and Andrew Strauss (19