

Axe hangs on Ash

Cricket

BISHWAJIT ROY

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is likely to sack under-performing Mohammad Ashraful from captaincy after the heartbreaking performance of the Tigers in the ICC World Twenty20 in England.

Bangladesh crashed out of the tournament from the first round after conceding a stunning defeat against Ireland.

The Board will take a decision on the captaincy in the next couple of days. And if the Board takes such decision then Ashraful will be at the mercy of the selectors for a place in the West Indies-bound team as a player.

"I don't find any reason to continue him [Mohammad Ashraful] as the captain when even his position as a player in the team is not certain. He got a 'bonus' time when we extended his tenure despite the fact that he was not performing. But he failed to capitalise on the chances," said BCB director Gazi Ashraf Hossain yesterday.

"Just forget what his performances are as a batsman since he has taken over the captaincy but the way he got out in the crucial match against Ireland is good enough to send him to a rehabilitation programme," the former national skipper fumed.

The game's administrators are also thinking on bringing wholesale changes in the team management including the selectors, coaches and the manager.

BCB's another director and spokesman Jalal Yunus also echoed the sentiment of Gazi Ashraf

and said that time has come to evaluate everything including the performances of coaches, other team officials and selectors to save cricket in the country.

"I think more or less everybody's [directors] feeling the same regarding the captaincy issue. No way can we continue him as the captain. Hope a decision would be on its way about the captaincy soon. Not only captain we are also looking forward to give a long look at everybody's performance because nobody has the right to jeopardise Bangladesh cricket," said Yunus adding that the downward trend in the national team performance also decreased the market value.

The 24-year-old Ashraful was appointed captain in June 2007 and the job was extended in February this year until the conclusion of the tour of West Indies in July-August but now there are slim chances for him to complete his extended tenure. Bangladesh cricket team will fly for the Caribbean on June 29 to play one T20, three ODIs and two Tests.

Gazi Ashraf also said that time has come to assess the performance of coach Jamie Siddons, whose two-year tenure will end in November this year, as he found hardly any improvement in the Tigers' batting under the Aussie's guidance.

"My personal opinion is that we can send someone to West Indies instead of Jamie [who is now in Australia and expected to join the team in West Indies] and I believe the performance of the team will not get any worse than what we are at the moment," said Ashraf.

"Time has come to evaluate his [Siddons] performance because we are paying huge money. Improving the batting was the main

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PHOTO: STAR

LEARNED THAT THERE COULD BE VACANCY AT THE TOP: Bangladesh vice-captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (L), star all-rounder Shakib Al-Hasan (R) and left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak have a chat during a practice session at the indoor facilities of the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Pepsi makes Al-Fahad's dream come true

SPORTS REPORTER

"Pepsi First Ball er Captain" Abdullah-Al-Fahad will bowl the ceremonial first ball to former West Indies captain and living legend Clive Lloyd before the start of the first semifinal of the ICC World Twenty20 at Trent Bridge in Nottingham, England.

It is a lifetime opportunity for Al-Fahad for being able to be present at a tournament of this magnitude, and at the same time, have the opportunity to bowl to a cricketing icon.

To experience this unbelievable moment, Al-Fahad has already reached England. STAR Cricket will telecast this event live to millions of fans in Bangladesh.

He will live this unique experience because of the great consumer offer from brand Pepsi, in which he enthusiastically participated.

According to Al-Fahad, the lucky winner of the Pepsi "First Ball er Captain": "I am extremely excited to have won such a fantastic promotion. I

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Lanka look to spinners

AFP, Nottingham



Sri Lanka expect the spinners to pick up another rich haul when they take on the West Indies in the World Twenty20 semifinal at The Oval on Friday.

The Sri Lankans have bulldozed their way through the tournament with five straight wins, mainly on the back of spin twins Ajantha Mendis and Muttiah Muralidaran who lead a balanced bowling attack.

Mendis, who puzzles batsmen by turning the ball both ways with one visible action, has so far picked up 11 wickets in the tournament, just one behind Pakistani seamer Umar Gul's tally of 12.

Muralidaran has five wickets, while fast bowler Lasith Malinga has picked up 10 with a mix of toe-crushing yorkers and slower deliveries.

Former captain Mahela

Jayawardene, who handed the reigns to Kumar Sangakkara before the tournament, said he was confident the bowlers will deliver at the crunch time.

"Look, Murali can turn the ball on any surface," Jayawardene said of the star off-spinner, who is the world's highest wicket-taker in both Tests and one-day cricket.

"And if Ajantha sticks to his plans, we have a fairly good chance of going all the way."

Mendis grabbed 3-9 in three overs as Sri Lanka routed New Zealand by 48 runs in their last Super Eights match at Trent Bridge on Tuesday.

The Black Caps failed miserably to chase down a target of 159 in a must-win game and were shot out for 110 in 17 overs.

SEMI-FINALS LINE-UP

World Twenty20 semifinals line-up after completion of Super Eights stage on Tuesday:

Date	Time	Game	Venue
June 18	22:30 BST	South Africa v Pakistan	Trent Bridge
June 19	22:30 BST	Sri Lanka v West Indies	The Oval

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Spain enter semis

AFP, Bloemfontein



Spain edged Iraq 1-0 to make the semifinals of the Confederations Cup on Wednesday and equal the world record for the longest winning streak by a national team.

A second-half goal by Valencia striker David Villa undid the resilient Asian champions for two wins out of two in Group A to ensure a place in the last four where they are likely to meet either Brazil or Italy.

The hard fought victory wrote their names in the history books with Spain, who have not been beaten since November 2006, matching the record of 14 straight victories held by Australia, Brazil and France.

They also moved to within one win of equaling the 35-match unbeaten run by Brazil between 1993 and 1996.

Vicente del Bosque was forced to start without Arsenal captain Cesc Fabregas who limped out of training on Tuesday after a strong tackle

by Liverpool midfielder Xabi Alonso.

He also rested Carles Puyol, Albert Reira and Raul Albiol, with Carlos Marchena, Gerard Pique, Juan Manuel Mata and Santi Cazorla in the starting 11.

Iraq coach Bora Milutinovic also rested several players, including star striker Younis Mahmoud, with his focus on their last match of the group stages against New Zealand, which he believes they can win.

Compared to their 5-0 thrashing of New Zealand on Sunday, this was a much tougher test for Spain and they made a hesitant start.

It took them eight minutes to unleash their first shot when Cazorla's left foot strike was easily gathered by goalkeeper Mohammed Kassid.

Irqi forward Alaa Abdul Zahra found the target soon after but it never threatened Iker Casillas, winning his 94th cap, in the Spanish goal.

Pique's glancing header went close on 15 minutes and Fernando Torres, Spain's hat-trick hero against New Zealand, almost got on the end of a looping Xavi through ball minutes later.

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TODAY'S T20 MATCH

(FIRST SEMI-FINAL)
South Africa v Pakistan
Venue: Trent Bridge
Time: 10:30pm

ESPN

FIFA Confederation Cup
USA v Brazil
Live from 8:00pm

Egypt v Italy
Live from 12:30am (Friday)

BTW & STAR Cricket

ICC World T20
(FIRST SEMI-FINAL)

South Africa v Pakistan

Live from 10:30pm

Cricket

ICC World T20

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