

Trio departs for WI Tests

SPORTS REPORTER

Robiul Islam, Shafiu Islam and Shuvagata Hom left for the West Indies last night in order to join Bangladesh's Test squad at St. Kitts. The two-match Test series will begin on September 5.

Slow left-arm Taijul Islam has also been named in the Test squad. He however left last week in a bid to join the Tigers' T20 squad. The lone T20 International will take place on August 27.

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Abdur Razzak and Taskin Ahmed will return to the country after the T20I.

In the absence of Shakib Al Hasan, Bangladesh will depend on Robiul Islam – who because of injury missed two of the Tigers' last four Tests -- to lead the bowling attack in the Test series. Shafiu Islam last played a Test match in Zimbabwe three years ago and has also been struggling with injuries.

Taijul is expected to replace Shakib as the only specialist slow-left armer in the side.

Conditional return for Shakib?

Tigers' performance sets BCB thinking

SPORTS REPORTER



Ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan is expected to get the green signal to return from his six-month suspension -- imposed by the board on disciplinary grounds in July this year -- ahead of schedule in a board meeting at Mirpur today afternoon.

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan Papon told The Daily Star that he would put forward a proposal to the board that would let the left-hander return on a conditional basis.

"As per the current terms of the suspension, the only set of competitive matches that he can play is the World Cup next year. How can one select a player for such a big competition all of a sudden? That's why I will propose that we let Shakib play the Zimbabwe series in October,"

said Papon.

If the proposal is passed the left-hander will return barely three months into his suspension. It is still not clear as to whether Shakib will be able to participate in the Dhaka Premier League which begins a few weeks before the Zimbabwe series. According to Papon, there could be a 'debate' on this issue in the meeting.

While the president was not clear as to what the focal point of the debate would be, many reckon that it may have to do with issues related to the clubs who will be participating in the DPL.

The decision to let Shakib play however, would not completely eliminate the left-hander's suspension sentence but withdraw it for the time being.

"The proposal is basically to withdraw his suspension sentence on a conditional basis. For instance, if we allow him to play this October

we will keep an eye on him. If we see that he is involved in yet another problem in the future we will add the remaining time from this suspension to his future punishment," explained Papon.

However, no change is expected to come in the board's decision on Shakib's receipt of no objection certificates, which basically means that the decision to not let him play in foreign leagues till December 31, 2015 may stand.

A discussion with regards to Mushfiquur Rahim's captaincy and the team's performance may also arise in today's board meeting. Board insiders are thinking of following a split captaincy formula, with Mashrafe Bin Mortaza a possible frontrunner to be Mushfiquur's successor in ODIs.

The board is also disappointed with the way the Tigers have performed in the West Indies.

"It's not as though we expected

them to do something great in the West Indies. However, we did not expect them to perform in this manner, to say the least. There were questions regarding the game plan and team selection. There were some decisions which we did not understand," said Papon.

"I understand that the team is going through a bad patch but really, how long can this bad patch run? It's surprising," he added in despair.

In a bid to get to the root of the cause of the current downfall, the board will also propose to form a technical committee that will have the authority to question the players after every series.

Apart from the cricketing issues on the field, the board is also expected to announce the dates for the election of BCB's vice-president today. The move comes almost 10 months after the board's executive committee was formed.

Naimur sent to seek answers

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has sent director and former Bangladesh captain Naimur Rahman to the West Indies in a bid to analyse the Tigers' disappointing run in the series so far.

In the first ODI, Bangladesh lost the match despite having reduced the hosts to 34 for five in the initial stages. In the second ODI, they were bundled out for an embarrassing 70.

The board has raised a number of questions with regards to the team management's strategies during this series and Naimur, who left for the West Indies yesterday, has been sent to get some answers.

"We have plenty of questions. We need to know why we are losing matches despite getting into winning positions. Some of the strategies used by the team were questionable and we need answers. That's why we have decided to send him," BCB president Nazmul Hassan Papon told The Daily Star yesterday.

"We are not interfering in the team management's planning. There have been a few abrupt changes in terms of the strategy and selection. We just need explanations. We will also talk to the players and find out whether they are under any sort of pressure or if they are facing any problems," he added.

It was learnt that the board was disappointed with strategies involving the exclusion of Abdur Razzak from the first game and Mominul Haque in the series.

Board directors reckoned that Razzak's slow left-armers could have been a threat to West Indies' right-handed middle order in the first game. They also felt that Mominul could have been a far better choice than playing four specialist openers at the top.

U-23s take on Nepal today

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh U-23 national football team are looking forward to making a winning start against their Nepalese counterparts when they face off in the first of two FIFA friendlies at the Army Stadium today. The match will start at 4:00pm and will be telecast live from the venue on BTV World.

Even though this is a match between the U-23 teams, arranged as part of preparation for next month's Asian Games, both teams have a number of senior national team players and will be regarded as a battle of pride between the two South Asian teams of similar strength. The statistics are in favour of the hosts, who have won 11 times, losing six and drawing twice in the 19 meetings between the senior national teams.

However, ahead of these friendlies, defence seems to be the major concern for the hosts, who conceded as many as four goals in their last practice match against Bangladesh Army team. In fact, the defence failed to make any impression in all of the practice matches, and it expected that they will come under a lot of pressure against a speedy Nepalese side, who gave the Bangladesh a hard time in their 2-0 win during the SAFF Championship last year.

National team's assistant coach Rene Koster thinks the team as a whole failed to work not work together against the army team while some of the players including goalkeeper Shahidul Alam Sohel made too many errors.

"Defending is a job of not only defenders, but of the whole team. All the players have to help each other and defend together. I have talked to the players and identified the mistakes they made in that match," said Koster. "However, I have faith in my defenders, who are good and can continue to improve before Tuesday's match."

Koster said he is happy to get Nepal to play two matches in a week and his target is to win both the matches.

"They are equal opponents. They are much better when they are playing at their home ground but this time we are playing at our home ground which is why we have a big chance to win. The players are working hard and I have faith in my players," said Koster.

Koster informed that he would share information regarding the players, practice match, training, formation with head coach Lodewijk de Kruij after the latter arrives from Netherlands on the morning of the match day (Tuesday). Rene will talk to Kruij about what he saw in the last practice match, what he saw in training sessions and Kruij will pick the starting eleven.

Halep survives opening scare

AFP, New York



Romanian second seed Simona Halep survived a scare against unranked American amateur Danielle Collins to reach the US Open second round on the opening day Monday.

Halep won 6-7 (2/7), 6-1, 6-2 against the 20-year-old Florida university student and next faces Slovakia's Jana Cepelova, who overcame Spaniard Maria-Teresa Torro-Flor 2-6, 7-5, 6-1, for a spot in the third round.

Earlier, Polish fourth seed Agnieszka Radwanska took just 47 minutes to hand out a 6-1, 6-0 rout to Canada's Sharon Fichman.

The 25-year-old Pole, who has never got beyond the fourth round in New York, goes on to face either Peng Shuai for a place in the third round. Peng beat Zheng Jie 6-3, 6-3 in an all Chinese duel.

In the men's draw, Italian Andreas Seppi defeated Sergiy Stakhovsky of Ukraine 6-3, 6-1 6-4, Australian Matthew Ebden beat Tobias Kamke of Germany 6-4, 6-3, 7-6 (7/2) and 23rd seeded Argentine Leonardo Mayer won against Albert Montanes, who retired when the scores were 6-2, 3-0.

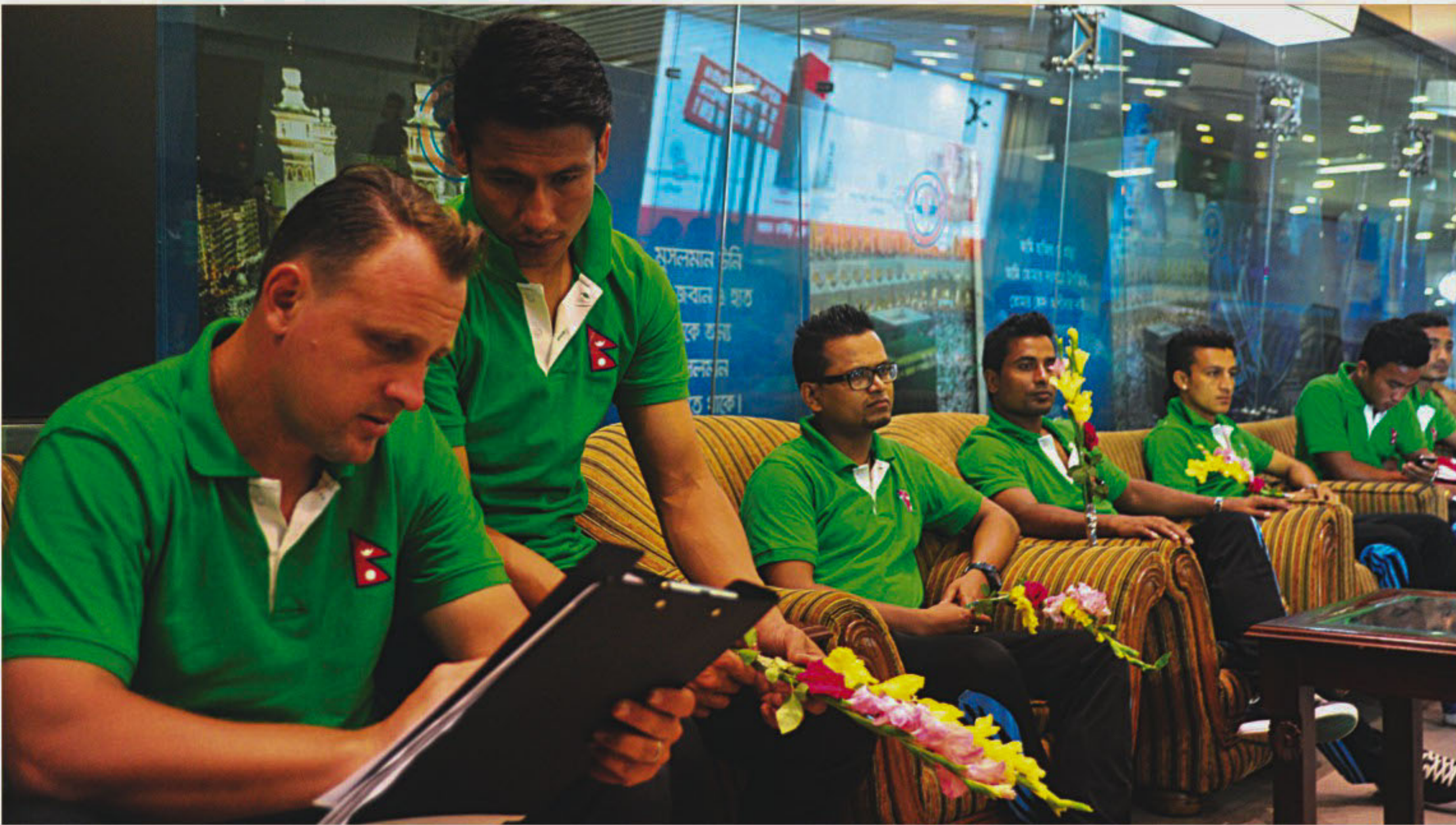


PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Nepal coach Jack Stefanowski (L) and captain Sagar Thapa are in midst of a discussion while others sit at the VIP lounge at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport yesterday after their arrival. The Nepalese team landed here four-and-a-half hours after their scheduled 4:40 pm arrival.

Aussies crush Zimbabwe

AFP, Harare

A brutal onslaught by Mitchell Marsh and George Maxwell carried Australia to a crushing 198-run victory over Zimbabwe in the first game of a one-day triangular series in Harare on Monday.

Marsh stroked 89 from 83 deliveries after coming in at number three, while Maxwell hammered 93 from just 46 balls in an Australian total of 350 for six.

Hamilton Masakadza's 70 was the only score of note for Zimbabwe, as they were bowled out for 152 to crash to their biggest ever defeat against Australia.

The Australians picked up a bonus point in the series standings, and will take on South Africa on Wednesday.

SCORES IN BRIEF

AUSTRALIA: 350 for 6 in 50 overs (Finch 67, Haddin 46, Marsh 89, Maxwell 93, Johnson 20 not out; Chatarra 2-77)

ZIMBABWE: 152 all out in 39.3 overs (Raza 33, Masakadza 70, Taylor 10, Mutumbami 11, Utseya 9; Starc 2-23, Lyon 2-42, Smith 3-16)

Result: Australia won by 198 runs.

Player-of-the-match: Mitchell Marsh.

Sanctions raise eyebrows

SPORTS REPORTER



The unequal level of punishment the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) imposed on two clubs of the Bangladesh Championship League and the severity of the nature of punishment on successful coach Maruful Haque on Sunday was the talk of the sports arena yesterday, with many sports organisers expressing their surprise over the decisions.

Farashganj SC and Wari Club, both of which were proven to have colluded in a fixed match on May 21 this year, escaped relegation thanks to the weak by-laws of the professional football league. The by-laws, which were amended by the Professional Football League Committee (PFLC) in the 2011-12 season, do not prescribe either the magnitude of punishment or any option to relegate clubs for the offence of match-fixing.

Even more questionable was the fact that for the same offence a number of players and officials of Wari Club have been suspended -- in addition to monetary fine and point curtailments -- while Farashganj SC came out with only monetary fines and point reductions.

However, the biggest controversy was about the one-year punishment of Maruful for breaching the code of conduct, which many thought was much too severe.

According to the BFF general secretary, the disciplinary committee was the body in charge of taking the decision, and the PFLC only provided them with an investigation report on the coach.

Former national booter and coach

Golam Sarwar Tipu feels that there might be a hidden agenda behind the decision.

"I am really surprised to see a one-year suspension on Maruf, who is one of the few educated coaches of the country and can serve the nation. If coaches are humiliated in such a way, then others will be discouraged to enter the coaching profession. I think the punishment he has been given is more than he deserves," said the veteran coach, adding that there might be someone behind this pursuing a personal agenda.

Echoing the sentiment of Tipu, coach Shafiqul Islam Manik said, "It is a sad decision as Maruf doesn't deserve such big punishment. However, the decision could have been more justifiable if it was taken immediately after the incident."

Satyajit Das Rupu, general secretary of the Bangladesh Coaches Association, said that Maruf could have been given an opportunity to defend himself before the decision was taken.

Meanwhile, a source within the BFF, wishing to remain anonymous, claimed yesterday that the original recommendation by the disciplinary committee was a six-month suspension which was turned into a year-long one by the PLFC, either by mistake or design.

Maruf, who is currently in England undertaking a UEFA A license (Part-II) coaching course, could not be reached for comment. However, he posted a message on his facebook account yesterday, referring to the punishment: "Still I am concentrating on my UEFA A license course. Nothing can stop me from earning the best coaching knowledge and study. You all just pray for me."

'Dhoni's comments personal opinion'

REUTERS, Mumbai



The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has labelled Mahendra Singh Dhoni's comments as "personal opinion" after the national team's captain said beleaguered coach Duncan Fletcher still called the shots and would lead them into next year's

World Cup.

"I have not spoken to Dhoni and so the BCCI will not like to react to his comments," BCCI secretary Sanjay Patel told Reuters on Monday about Dhoni's comments on the eve of their one-day series against England which appeared to undermine former captain Ravi Shastri.

"However, it seemed to me as his personal opinion." Shastri was appointed as director of cricket for the one-day series as part of a coaching shake-up following the 3-1 Test series defeat.

The appointment had created questions about Fletcher's role after bowling coach Joe Dawes and fielding mentor Trevor Penney were also given a 'break' for the series by the BCCI.

Sanjay Bangar and Bharat Arun were made assistant coaches and R. Sridhar named as fielding coach.

The 52-year-old Shastri, who played 80 tests and 150 ODIs for India, said after his appointment the team staff, including Fletcher, would report to him.

The 33-year-old Dhoni, who leads India in all three formats and captained the side to their 50-over World Cup victory at home in 2011, however said Fletcher was still firmly in charge.

"Definitely he [Fletcher] will lead us into the World Cup," Dhoni told reporters in Bristol on the eve of the five-match series. "Also he is still the boss."

"We have Ravi [Shastri] who will look into everything, but Duncan Fletcher is the boss. It's not as if his powers or his position have been curtailed."

"I don't know what you feel from outside, but still operations remain the same."

"We have a few other support staff who come into the dressing room, but overall the operation remains the same."