

Shakib-like confidence

SPORTS REPORTER

"On paper Bangladesh is a better team than visiting Zimbabwe," was the encouraging statement made by all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan yesterday, ahead of the start of the first Test tomorrow at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

He said that the team is only thinking about victory in the series, which is very important for the Tigers as win has been elusive in 2014.

The Tigers are under huge pressure following their continual defeats this year, so expectations are running high as they face the lowly opponents in their own den.

As usual, Shakib has a simple recipe to overcome this pressure.

"The team is under pressure, but we know if we can follow the basics and do the right things on the field, it will be possible to get a win. We have plenty of match-winners in our team

and I am confident that the win will come if we can execute our plan," said the all-rounder, who is going to return to Test cricket after serving a two-and-a-half-month ban, adding that they could not solely depend on their spin bowlers to take 20 wickets in order to win the Test match.

The situation was similar when the two teams met in a Test series last time but the Tigers fell short of expectations. "See the conditions were different there [as both the series in 2011 and 2013 were played in Zimbabwe]. We could not become accustomed to the conditions which was a problem. We will not face this kind of problem on home soil and I think on paper we are the better team. We are better in batting and both spin and fast bowling. But they may have an edge in the fielding department," he said.

It was a typical Shakib answer when his attention was drawn to whether the issue of ratings would play in the minds of the players. "It has not come to my mind and I don't

know about the others' thoughts. It is important to play good cricket and nothing can be better than a win."

The response was the same when asked if there was any pressure going into the series. "I am not feeling any different and everybody is eager to do well in the series."

The trend continued when he responded to a question about whether there would be any special challenges for him, given the fact that he missed the previous series while serving the ban.

"No, there is no such challenge. I came here to play, and will try to do my best."

Shakib's suspension was not only reduced to allow him to make an early return, but he was also awarded with the vice-captaincy role for the one-day side. He however has no special feelings towards it. "I am not thinking about the one-day series now. Let's see what kind of emotions come to me once the one-day series gets underway."



PHOTO: STAR

Ace Bangladesh all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan attends a training session in preparation for the upcoming Zimbabwe series at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

UCBL to sell Zim series tickets

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The tickets of the Bangladesh-Zimbabwe series will be available at the different branches of the United Commercial Bank Limited (UCBL) from Saturday.

The minimum price for a day's ticket has been fixed at Tk 20 for the Tests and the most expensive tickets will cost Tk 1,000. For the ODIs, the prices will range between Tk 100 and 300.

The tickets will be available at the bank's Dhanmondi, Bashundhara, Bijoy Nagar, Uttara and Mirpur branches in Dhaka; Muradpur, Dampara, Andorkilla and Halishahar in Chittagong and the Main and Khan Jahan Ali branches in Khulna.

The online ticket sale has already started yesterday and the token holders will have to collect the tickets between 8:00-8:30 am on the match day.

Spectators will have to pay a 15 per cent VAT in addition to a ticket's face value. Apart from the UCBL branches, some special booths will be set up around the stadium with the purpose of selling tickets prior to the start of the match.

Javed Iqbal, executive vice president and head of corporate affairs in UCBL, revealed all the details at a press conference at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

ACTION REMODELLING Shohag to go to Malaysia

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Off-spinner Shohag Gazi will travel to Malaysia to remodel his bowling action under the supervision of Mohammad Salahuddin, the former Bangladesh fielding coach who is now a coach at a Malaysian university.

"We have decided to send him to Malaysia for several reasons. We thought it would be better for him to work under Salahuddin who had successfully monitored Abdur Razzak during his suspension. Our other coaches are busy with the upcoming series, and another reason is that he will be able to work there silently," said BCB's cricket operations committee chairman Akram Khan.

"He [Shohag] will fly after receiving the visa and is expected to stay there till November 15, though the exact date is yet to be fixed," he added.

Shohag's action was deemed illegal by the International Cricket Council last month.

Sagor's eight in 8

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The RMM Group 27th National Swimming Championships ended with two more national records on the concluding day at the newly-built Swimming Pool and Gymnasium Complex in Gopalganj yesterday.

Nayma Akter and the women's team of Bangladesh Navy set new marks in the 100m backstroke and the 4x100m medley relay respectively, taking the overall records set to 15 out of 38 events settled in the four-day meet.

Nayma of Bangladesh Navy erased Sonia Akter's record of 1:17.44 with a time of 1:17.32 in the 100m backstroke, while Navy's Nazma Khatun, Sonia Akter, Mahfuza Akter Shila and Lima Akter produced a new record with a time of 5:00.50. The previous record was 5:02.20, forged by Bangladesh Ansar in 2010.

Meanwhile ace swimmer Mahfizur Rahman Sagor completed his mission of winning eight out of eight events he participated in as the 21-year-old swimmer from Bangladesh Navy won gold in the 100m and 400m freestyle and 4x100m medley relay on the concluding day.

Sagor was adjudged the best swimmer in the men's section while his teammate Sonia Akter Tumpa was named the best women swimmer, after winning seven gold and creating six national records.

Bangladesh Navy emerged champions with 26 gold, 13 silver and 17 bronze followed by Bangladesh Army, who won 14 gold, 24 silver and 14 bronze. BKSP finished a distant third with three gold medals.

State Minister for Youth and Sports Biren Shikder declared a reward of Tk 10,000 for each new record.

Zim up to the challenge

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It's no secret that the Tigers have pinned their hopes on their slow bowlers to deliver the wickets against Zimbabwe.

One can label the match as a battle between Bangladesh's spin and Zimbabwe's batting. But Stephen Mangongo, the Zimbabwe coach, was not ready to accept the single-minded thought and referred to the flipside saying, "I also take that, but at the same time their batsmen have to score runs and the seamers have to join the party."

Both the coach and visiting skipper Brendan Taylor however showed respect to their opponents in their dialogue during the first official press conference at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.



BRENDAN TAYLOR

day. They said that it was a challenge for them to face Bangladesh at their home but they were ready to accept the challenge.

Taylor said every series is important and the excitement further increases when they play Bangladesh.

Praising Bangladesh's home successes, he also reminded of the fact that they had had success against Bangladesh and that his side was confident of doing well in the Tests and ODIs as they worked hard and prepared meticulously for the series.

"Besides, we haven't played a Test outside of our country in the last 18 months, so this series will be challenging for us."

Mangongo echoed his captain's sentiments, but said that his side would miss spinner Prosper Utseya, who was banned for an illegal bowling action.

Biggest occasion since 1973

ATIQUE ANAM from Jessore



Jessore is all geared up to host its first-ever international football match today. The historic Shamsul Huda Stadium, which is said to have once hosted Dynamo Moscow against a Bangladesh team way back in 1973, is set to grab the headlines again as it stages the first of a two-match FIFA International Series between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka.

The 12,000-capacity stadium, which looks nondescript even by a district standard, was taking last-minute paintbrushes last evening to make it look attractive. The pitch, although quite even, looked rugged

and was in need of some watering. The coaches of the teams, who didn't have an opportunity to have a practice session at the venue prior to the match, were expecting a sub-standard pitch.

But whatever the state of the ground and gallery is, there should be no shortage of people at the venue. All 12,000 tickets – priced at Tk 20, 50 and 200 – have been sold officially through the District Football Association, but quite a few thousand more have been allegedly black-marketed and at a high-price, thanks to the sky-high demand.

Asaduzzaman Mithu, president of Jessore DFA, claimed that since it was the first-ever international match in the town, demand for tickets were at least ten times more than the supply.

"We have heard that a group touts have printed counterfeit tickets and sold them en masse," Mithu admitted.

The DFA president is also aware of the fact that similar sort of scenario had led to uncontrollable situation during the August 29 friendly between Bangladesh U-23 and Nepal U-23 in Sylhet. But he claims his organisation has taken necessary precautions.

"Three-tier security will be in place around the stadium and every ticket will be screened at least half a kilometre away from the entry gates. Local administration and security forces are working on it," informed Mithu.

Whatever the realities are, everyone is hoping that people will enjoy this big occasion in a disciplined manner.

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