

SPORT

GOOD LUCK TIGERS

SPORTS REPORTER

As reporters approached Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport last evening, doubts began to rise regarding the Bangladesh national cricket team's exact location. An official press conference wasn't planned; expectedly so, considering that captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and coach Chandika Hathurusingha had spoken at length two days ago.

Even then, the fact that Bangladesh's contingent for the World Cup was about to leave was reason enough for the entire media fraternity to show up.

They weren't going to use the VIP entrance as they normally did, team manager Khaled Mahmud informed earlier. However, he wasn't quite sure as to which departure gate they would all be entering through.

All those doubts however were quenched once reporters got on the departure platform and saw an enthusiastic Shoyab Ali -- the Tigers fan who follows the team everywhere they go -- waving the



A Tigers fan waves the national flag at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport prior to the Bangladesh national cricket team's departure for Brisbane last night.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Bangladesh flag non-stop in front of gate number three.

As players got out of their respective cars, they were surrounded by cameramen. In addition to the gun-like cameras on the shoulders came the mobile phones from other travellers who joined in, possibly in a bid to update their facebook and twitter

accounts.

As the players struggled through the crowd a few words were spoken. "I want to do something big," muttered Arafat Sunny. "Let's hope

we do well in Brisbane first," said a smiling Anamul Haque, accompanied by a host of relatives.

The other player who had company was Mushfiqur Rahim. The security had to form a man-made barricade to let a seemingly nervous Mushfiqur scurry through to the gate. His father though was more than happy to speak to the media. "As long as he doesn't injure himself he will do great," said the bearded gentleman.

By 7 pm all the players, save for the captain, were in for their 9 pm flight.

Mashrafe arrived half-an-hour later with his family. Carrying his daughter in his lap, he began walking towards the gate, assuring the 20-odd cameramen that he would speak to them.

As soon as he entered the gate, he let go of his daughter and geared up for one last press conference prior to the World Cup. He spoke a number of lines, but it was his last sentence that perhaps touched the 20-odd newsmen out there.

"Pray for us," he said with a soft voice, which oddly enough despite the noise was quite audible.



Cricket loses a true lover

AL-AMIN



How good a person he was in other fields is not our concern. We, the sports lovers, who do not have any political affiliations, deep in our hearts, believe that Arafat Rahman was a selfless and committed person when it came to serving cricket.

This young man, better known as the younger son of two-time Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, died in Malaysia yesterday at the age of 45.

Interestingly, yesterday was also the day Bangladesh cricket team left Dhaka to take part in the forthcoming World Cup down under.

We don't know how many cricketers shed little drops of tears on their way to Australia, but this vibrant new breed of Tigers owes quite a bit to this toothy gentleman for coming all the way through a strong regimented youth system.

Arafat was a part of Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) when an elected body was in exile. He served as the chairman of BCB games development committee over 2002-05. Do you want to know his biggest contribution to Bangladesh cricket during that time? Ask Faruque Ahmed.

"If I have to say it in one sentence I will call it as a golden era of games development in Bangladesh cricket," remarked the chief selector.

What did Arafat do then? Did he use all the might of his mother's power to promote cricket? Interestingly, he did the simple things most of us tend to forget. He revived the youth development programme in partnership with the Australian Cricket Board, which was a dream of Saber Hossain Chowdhury. The High Performance (HP) and games development programmes not only got a real shape during his time, but also paved the way for producing cricketers like Shakib Al Hasan, Mushfiqur Rahim and Tamim Iqbal. It was during his time the youth programme, the development and rehabilitation programmes and Level 1 and 2 coaches programmes flourished, the benefits of which we are now reaping.

He might not have done enough to build an academy then, but made sure of international standard indoor facilities at four venues. He was also the most vocal in favour of shifting cricket to Mirpur permanently, ending a perpetual battle for the possession of the Bangabandhu National Stadium with football. And eventually it has done wonders for cricket.

The BCB Academy, now proudly standing next to the home of cricket in Mirpur, is the fruit of his tireless effort.

At the helm of BCB's games development committee now is our own former national captain, Khaled Mahmud. But, like it or not, Mahmud, who has already earned a nickname as the jack of all trades, has been entrusted with the job of managing the robust Tigers in the World Cup, leaving the window for a bleak future of a stagnant youth system.

However, when Mushfiqur, Tamin and Shakib take the field in Canberra come February 18, let's hope the Tigers take inspiration from those selfless cricketing souls like Arafat to bring earthly and heavenly smiles.

Papon responds to PCB offer

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), through a letter on Thursday, responded to the Pakistan Cricket Board's (PCB's) demand that the PCB should receive half of the earnings from the upcoming series between the two teams scheduled to begin in April.

According to BCB president Nazmul Hassan Papon, the letter touched on two crucial issues.

"Firstly, we wanted to draw PCB's attention to the fact that when New Zealand had cancelled their tour of Pakistan in 2008, we decided to send our national team there to play five ODIs and a T20I. And we did not ask for a share of revenue from that series. It helped them from suffering deeper losses.

"We acknowledge the fact that Bangladesh were supposed to tour Pakistan in 2014, but one has to understand that at that point of time, the matter was out of the BCB's hands. There was a public outcry and a case was filed against the tour," Papon told The Daily Star.

"We also stated that if we received security clearance then we would explore the opportunity of sending any side, apart from the national team, to Pakistan. However, we still don't think it's the right time to send our national cricket team there," added Papon.

Media reports in Pakistan on Friday revealed that the PCB demanded 50 per cent of the revenue from the BCB in return for touring Bangladesh. The PCB also apparently wanted to begin bilateral tours between the countries' under-19 and second-string teams.

Bangladesh face Ukraine today

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh national hockey team will face Ukraine in the 5th/6th place deciding match of the Hockey World League (round-2) in Singapore today.

Having missed out on the opportunity to go through to the last four, Bangladesh will look to grab a consolation fifth position by winning today's match. The match will begin at 1:00pm Bangladesh time.

'Don't want to be a burden'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal, who attended his last practice session at Mirpur yesterday, has vowed to be completely fit in time for Bangladesh's World Cup campaign. The player, who leaves for Australia today, a day after his mates, said that while he faces no problems with his knee during batting, he remained unsure regarding his sprints.

"I don't feel any pain in my knee while batting. I have been able to play all kinds of pace bowlers. I also ran 12 laps without any issues. But I am yet to go through my sprinting exercises.

"Prior to the operation, my knee used to hurt while running. If that pain does not recur then I think I can make a lot of progress. I will begin my sprinting exercises in Australia," said Tamim, who recently had a surgery on his left knee.

The left-hander has already taken two injections and is scheduled to take a third in Australia on February 27, before joining the team the day after.

Bangladesh coach Chandika Hathurusingha had earlier made it clear that the left-hander would have to be a hundred per cent fit in order to make the team and Tamim is confident of meeting the Sri Lankan's demands.

"No one will want an unfit player to

play in such a big event. But I hope that if I play, I will be hundred per cent fit because I don't want to be a burden on my team. It's not just the batting, even fielding is important.

"Yes I missed a good training session here [due to the surgery], but I feel that if I can do well in the 14-day training camp in Brisbane there won't be any problems," hoped Tamim.

The Tigers are scheduled to play two



unofficial matches at Brisbane before they face Pakistan and Ireland for their warm-up fixtures in Sydney.

"I should at least be able to play the two warm-up games. I also want to play one match at Brisbane because I have heard that of all the wickets the one in Brisbane is expected to be the most difficult. It all depends on my sprinting exercises," said Tamim.

Contrary to the popular view in the country, Tamim expects Australia's bouncy conditions to be a boon for his batting.

"I think my batting style suits those kinds of wickets. For the stroke-makers, Australia and New Zealand is perfect. There have been plenty of nervy talks about the wicket, but if you look at history, Asian teams have done well there. They have always scored runs.

"For batting, Australia has one of the best wickets. I don't think the wicket will be an issue," opined Tamim.

He however, believed that batsmen needed to follow a 'different approach' down under.

"I have been watching videos of innings played there. They are a lot more careful at the start. You can't just go and start hitting. You need to take time. I will try and see off the new ball in the first ten overs," the batsman said.

At 25, Tamim is set to play his third World Cup. With a changed batting approach, which has seen him put an emphasis on spending more time on the crease, this World Cup will witness a different Tamim.

"In the first World Cup, I never had any goals. I was just happy to be able to play against so many greats. In the second, I couldn't live up to my expectations. The third hasn't begun well but I hope it ends well," he concluded.

Aamer making first-class return?

AFP, Karachi

Disgraced Pakistan paceman Mohammad Aamer could return to first-class cricket as early as next month after a relaxation of the conditions of his ban for spot-fixing, an official said Friday.

Aamer, 22, was banned for five years along with Salman Butt and Mohammad Asif in a spot-fixing case in England in 2010, and the trio were jailed by a UK court in 2011.

The paceman was interviewed in Lahore Friday by the International Cricket Council (ICC) after the governing body revised the players' code of conduct in November last year, adding a provision that allows a banned player to play in domestic games a certain period prior to the end of the ban.

The change of rules prompted the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) to file an appeal with the ICC to relax certain conditions of Aamer's ban last year.

A final decision on Aamer's appeal will be taken in ICC Board meeting in Dubai next week.

TIGERS' VENUES DOWN UNDER

NAJMUN NOOR

At this relatively newer venue in New Zealand, Bangladesh will be eager to register an emphatic win over Scotland on March 5. The venue is a purpose-built and picturesque location dedicated for cricket. There are not enough stats to refer to considering the historical perspective, or the lack of it. After hosting a handful of domestic fixtures, the Saxton Oval suddenly finds itself in the Big League alongside venues with big names. For Bangladesh, the venue is drawdown somewhat removed from bustle and din or the noisy fans that its players are accustomed to. In sharp contrast, the Saxton Oval is cut out and suited for



opponents Scotland.

The author is a marketing professional from the airline and telecommunications industry. He is a former Bangladesh national cricket player.

Giant screen to air matches in Sylhet

SPORTS REPORTER

A giant screen will be installed on the Keane Bridge, a landmark bridge over the Surma river in Sylhet, to air the matches of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup, it was disclosed after a meeting of the tournament organising committee at the Bangladesh Football Federation House (BFF) yesterday.

The meeting was chaired by finance minister Abul Maal Abdul Muhith, who later briefed the media about the meeting's decisions.

"We will install a large screen over the Keane's bridge to air the matches because of the popularity of the game in Sylhet. We will make sure that the tickets for the four matches in Sylhet are not sold above stadium capacity," said the finance minister.

Muhith also assured that the 15-crore taka budget for the Bangabandhu Gold Cup will be met through different sources. However, the finance minister dodged questions regarding BFF's proposed annual budget to the finance ministry.

'We can go far'

SPORTS REPORTER



Lodewijk de Kruif expressed his optimism about Bangladesh national team's chances in the Bangabandhu Gold Cup after taking temporary charge of the team yesterday. The Dutchman said he was happy

with the fitness of the players and would want to win every match in the group stages.

"The players we have are all good. Our target will be to win three points in each match and I want to take each match at a time," de Kruif told reporters after administering a practice session at BKSP in Savar in the afternoon.

Bangladesh take on Malaysia U-23 team in the opening fixture of the tournament in Sylhet on

January 29 before facing Sri Lanka in the final match of Group A in Dhaka on January 2. The 45-year-old coach said since Bangladesh will be playing at home, the best could be expected from them.

"I have seen video footages of Malaysia's senior team while Sri Lanka are a known quantity to us. I'm not taking anyone lightly but I have the confidence of doing well against these teams," added the Dutchman who arrived in Dhaka in the early hours of Saturday.

De kruif also informed that he was in constant touch with the players and interim coach Saiful Bari Titu and briefed Titu about the practice sessions.

"I am satisfied with the fitness of the players. I will work only on match situations and tactical aspects in the remaining sessions as the other aspects have already been covered by Titu," de Kruif added.

Having lost their first practice match by 0-2 goals against Abahani on Monday, the national team are scheduled to play their second and final practice match against Bangladesh Premier League champions Sheikh Jamal DC at BKSP today. De kruif however was not bothered about the defeat against Abahani.

"I don't want to read too much into the defeat against Abahani. It was only a practice match where experiments are made. The team that we have, I think we can go far," added de Kruif.

The Dutch coach, who was unceremoniously sacked by the Bangladesh Football Federation 16 months into his two-year contract in October, 2014, declined to comment on either his latest negotiations with the BFF or the possibility of an extension of term after the end of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup.

