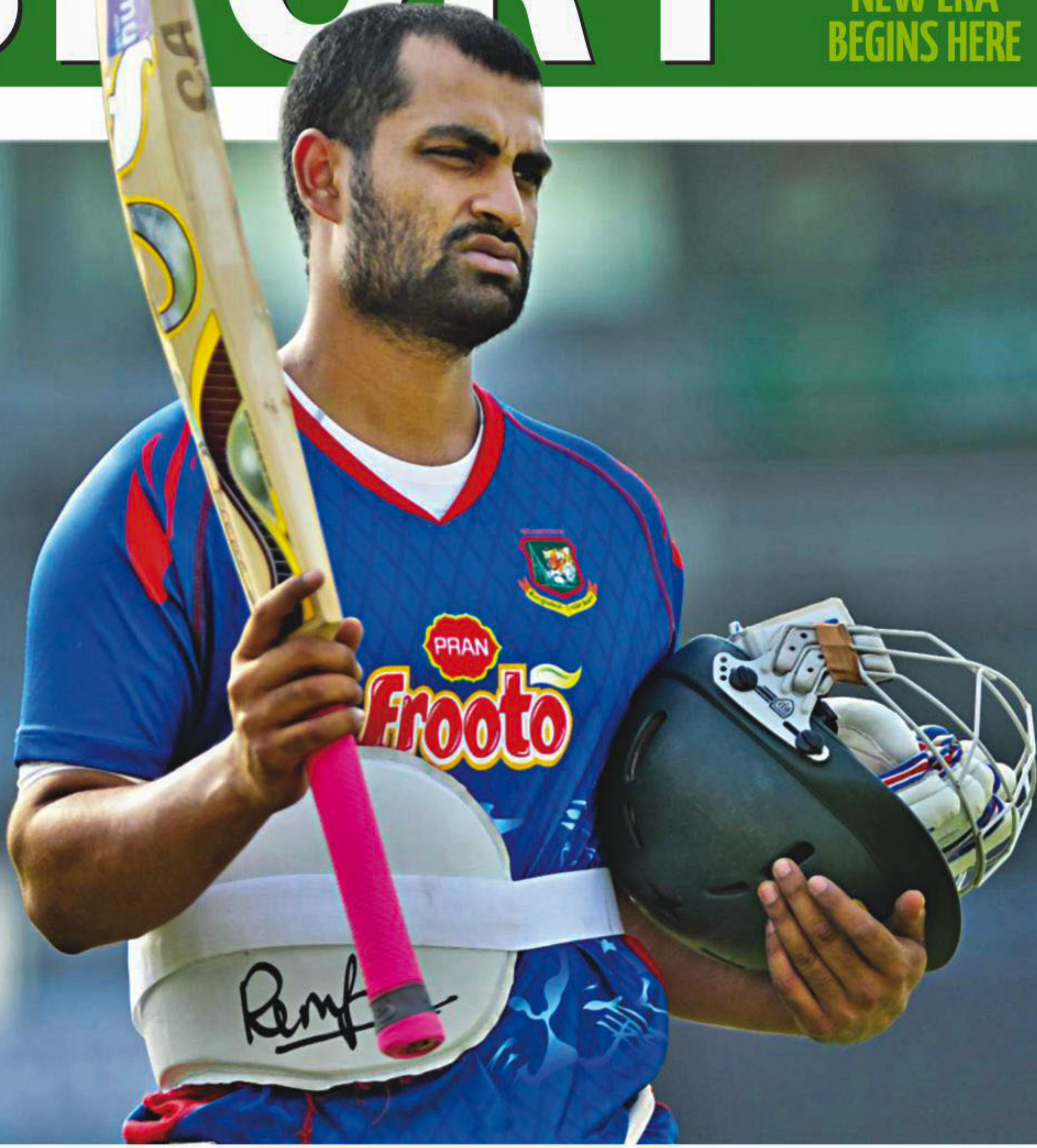


# SPORT



Can Tamim Iqbal make it three in three at the Sher-e-Bangla Stadium in Mirpur today?

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Dead-rubber with a difference

BISHWAJIT ROY



"Just look at the little man... he has been amazing!" Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza bowed his head in respect as he passed this comment to a few reporters while addressing Mushfiqur Rahim who was walking back to the dressing room after his batting practice in the nets at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday, ahead of the Tiger's third and final ODI against Pakistan today.

The wicketkeeper-batsman Mushfiqur was described as amazing because of his run-sprees in the last two years. The man from Bogra is highly respected among his team mates due to his outstanding and rare consistency with the bat, which has earned him the well-regarded tag of "Mr. Dependable".

And without a shadow of a doubt, a player can only earn this kind of respect and win the hearts of million by showing consistency. Bangladesh will definitely look to his long bat when they take the field today to complete a 'Banglawayash' on Pakistan, but everybody will also be looking forward to another man; Tamim Iqbal. The left-hander, who has silenced his critics by scoring two consecutive hundreds in this series.

When Bangladesh skipper Mashrafe talked about his team's chances of a whitewash, the brave-hearted cricketer diplomatically said, "Anything can happen in cricket. One team can have a bad day in the office. But with regards to confidence, there is no shortage of it in the camp at the moment." This sentiment is also applicable to any

individual. After two brilliant hundreds a bad day can come for Tamim, but the left hander should make sure that he applies the right approach in the middle so that he can cash in on his good form.

Bangladesh is now in good form and rhythm as a team since they continued their impressive World Cup performances against Pakistan. And when a team stands in such a position they must pounce on every opportunity and every Tigers fan and well-wishers would love to see that Bangladesh capitalise on the opportunity they have against Pakistan. As Mashrafe said, consistent performances can bring real honour to any team and help them establish themselves as a good side in the world's cricketing fraternity.

It's also true for any player, particularly for Tamim.

The Chittagonian once again proved that he has got the ability to excel with his bat and his last two innings showed his strength. These two innings have relieved him. He may not need to prove his class and worth again, but he still has a lot to do to reach his desired standard. He must especially be consistent if he wants to improve his average to silence his critics for good. A brilliant Mushfiqur is a good blueprint for him about how one should capitalise on their good form.

So a dead rubber cannot be a dead affair for the Bangladesh team or its players, as the onus is on them to continue their performances -- not only to score a historic 'Banglawayash' against Pakistan -- but to show that they can be consistently consistent; and consistently great.

## IN A NUTSHELL

### KKR with Ankit's family

AGENCIES, Delhi

Kolkata Knight Riders skipper Gautam Gambhir has said that the two-time IPL champions will do everything in their power to provide support to the late Ankit Keshri's family. The 20-year-old cricketer from Bengal passed away on Monday after suffering a fatal collision with a colleague on the cricket field on Friday.

"The boy is not there with us and it is very disturbing. You can't replace what the family has lost. But I can assure you one thing that we [KKR] would go out there and do whatever we can for the family," Gambhir said after Kolkata's resounding victory over the Delhi Daredevils at the Feroz Shah Kotla.

### KP flattered by Waugh remarks

ANI, Johannesburg

England's out-of-favour batsman Kevin Pietersen said that he has been flattered by Australian legend Steve Waugh's critical remark that the maverick cricketer is now not worthy of a Test recall.

The sacked England batsman stated on Twitter that he grew up idolising guys like Steve Waugh, adding that it is quite flattering to see legends like Waugh commenting on his situation, Sport24 reported.

Pietersen made a promising start in his bid to make an international comeback as he smashed 170 for Surrey against Oxford MCCU last week.

### Kate in the league of men

AGENCIES, Lancashire

English international cricketer Kate Cross created history by becoming the first female cricketer to play in the Central Lancashire League. She represented Heywood Cricket Club in a match against Clifton Cricket Club on Monday.



The 23-year-old put on a good show, picking up figures of 3 for 19 from 7 overs in the match, with one of her strikes coming in the first over she bowled. Her spell was one of the biggest factors in Heywood registering an easy 8-wicket victory on the day.

Her brother Bobby was also part of the Heywood XI and dropped a catch off Kate's bowling.

### Africa T20 Cup launched

INTERNET, Cape Town

In a bid to promote the game and nurture young talent in the continent, Cricket South Africa (CSA) has announced a new tournament to be known as the Africa T20 Cup.

The tournament featuring Zimbabwe, Kenya, Namibia, hosts South Africa and 12 CSA affiliates will run from September 4 to October 4.

CSA said the tournament will be a World Cup-style competition, consisting of four pools of four teams each with the winners of each pool advancing to the semifinals and eventually to the final.

## 'Give Ajmal some time'

SPORTS REPORTER



Prior to the start of the series there were plenty of talks about how the Saeed Ajmal-factor would pan out. In fact, Bangladesh coach Chandika Hathurusingha even believed that much of the ODI series would depend upon how the hosts dealt with Ajmal.

Having bowled his most expensive figures in the first ODI and barely threatening the hosts in the second, it was clear that the off-spinner had yet to get settled in with his new bowling action. His performance even sparked criticism back home.

Pakistan spin-coach and former national leg-spinner Mushtaq Ahmed though believed that it was only a matter of time before Ajmal regained his confidence.

"He is a tough cookie. He came back when people thought he wouldn't be able to make it. He changed the action with which he had been bowling for 20 years. Although he hasn't been successful, he has been calm and I am sure he is going to bowl well in the upcoming matches.

"He doesn't have a variation as yet but he is working hard in the nets... hopefully he will be a lot more confident next time around," said Mushtaq.

With regards to the series, Mushtaq admitted that he was disappointed with the defeat. He however reckoned that the inexperienced Pakistani outfit required just one inspirational performance to change their luck.

"It's hurting but the game moves on. We have to forget the past. It may be a matter of just one good innings or one good spell."



Pakistan's spin bowling coach Mushtaq Ahmed (2nd from L) will hope that his troops can take full advantage of Bangladesh's turning wickets to salvage some pride in the third and final ODI today.

PHOTO: STAR

## U-19s' cherry on the cake

SPORTS REPORTER

Saleh Ahmed spun Bangladesh Under-19s to a comfortable 45-run victory against South Africa Under-19s in the sixth Youth ODI of the seven-match series at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong yesterday.

With the victory, the home team, who earlier confirmed the series win, stretched their lead to 5-1. The final match will take place at the same venue on April 23.

Left-arm spinners Saleh claimed five wickets for 25 and Nihaduzzaman captured three wickets for 23 runs as the visitors were bundled out for 174 runs in reply to 219 runs.

Opener Rivaldo Moonsamy made team highest 61 runs off 78 balls with six fours.

Earlier, Bangladesh Under-19s scored 219 runs after deciding to bat first. Saiful Hayat hit highest 83 off 96 balls with five fours and a six while Mehedi Miraz scored a consecutive half-century.

**SCORES IN BRIEF BANGLADESH UNDER-19S:** 219 all out in 46.2 overs (Shanto 18, Shafiq 83, Mehedi 57; Foxcroft 3-44, Senokwane 2-51) **SOUTH AFRICA UNDER-19S:** 174 all out in 45.1 overs (Moonsamy 61, Foxcroft 26, Galiem 36; Nihaduzzaman 3-23, Saleh 5-25) **Result:** Bangladesh Under-19s won by 45 runs.

## Ruwan for many options

NAIMUL KARIM



After five overs of Taskin Ahmed and Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, India looked unperturbed and had eased their way to a comfortable 26 for no loss in the quarterfinal at Melbourne. That's when skipper Mashrafe, against all the odds, introduced Nasir Hossain into the attack.

It's not as though Nasir is not used to bowling. He had bowled decently against New Zealand in the previous match as well. But to bring him on in the powerplay ahead of the likes of Shakib Al Hasan and Rubel Hossain, displayed just how much confidence Mashrafe had in him.

Nasir's tight line and length left the batsmen in a quandary and the game turned in the next 10 overs. His figures of none for 35 in nine overs in a crunch encounter displayed just how much he had improved his bowling; and this of course wasn't just a coincidence. It seems to be a part of the plan set-up by the

team management, keeping in mind the balance of the national team.

Spin-coach Ruwan Kalpage yesterday revealed how the management has been working with the part-time spinners in a bid to make them more effective with the ball.

"In the past, in these conditions in Mirpur we would have played just one or two pacers. But that is not the case now. We have pacers and spinners... we have progressed a lot. Now when we pick a team we look to provide the captain with a lot more options.

"For instance, in the last match Shakib [Al Hasan] and [Arafat] Sunny were the only ones who bowled out their quotas but we still put up a good performance because the captain had options," explained Kalpage at Mirpur yesterday.

"Shakib and Nasir are two top order batsmen who can bowl well. We are also hoping to get Sabbir [Rahman] going in the T20s. If that works out we will have three top order batsmen who can bowl well and have more options," he added.



## Anamul's slow return

SPORTS REPORTER



Opener Anamul Haque returned from injury to post a hard-fought 94 for Prime Bank South Zone on Day One of the first match of the Bangladesh Cricket League's longer version tournament against BCB North Zone at Fatullah yesterday.

This was Anamul's first game since he injured his shoulder in the World Cup against Scotland. His injury was the only reason why he couldn't make it to the ODI squad for the Pakistan series.

As opposed to his general approach, the batsman took his time for the innings. He faced 226 balls for his 94 and spent close to six hours at the crease before getting caught

off Saqlain Sajib.

He hit three sixes and seven fours in the innings. South Zone got in trouble early after electing to bat as their top order crumbled against Ariful Haque's burst with the new ball.

Ariful took four wickets in his first spell and reduced South Zone to 19 for 4 after 10 overs.

That's when wicketkeeper Nurul Hasan joined Anamul at the crease and together they stitched a 142-run stand to bring them back in the game.

After their dismissals, Shohag Gazi and Ziaur Rahman fought hard to help South Zone finish the day on 255 for 8.

### SCORES IN BRIEF

**SOUTH ZONE:** 255 for 8 (Anamul 94, Nurul 78, Ziaur 38, Shohag 24 not out; Ariful 6-48, Forhad 1-4, Saqlain 1-26)

## Misbah sides with Waqar

### Yousuf blasts coach, board

AGENCIES, Karachi



Former skipper Misbahul Haq has defended the poor performance of Pakistan cricketers in the opening two one-day internationals against Bangladesh.

"This is a young team and needs more time to improve under a new captain Azhar Ali," Misbah said on Monday. Pakistan lost the first ODI by 79 runs and suffered seven-wicket loss in the second as Bangladesh registered their first-ever series win over their rivals.

Misbah, who retired from ODI cricket after leading Pakistan to the quarterfinals in the World Cup, believed the team needed some time to settle down.

He said Azhar just took the reins of captaincy and it was not easy to turn the things around overnight.

Misbah said the team was undergoing rebuilding process and it would take some months to develop.

Commenting on Saeed Ajmal, he said the off-spinner was staging a comeback after eight months when he was suspended by the International Cricket Council for illegal action. "It's not easy for Saeed Ajmal to be the same again within a short time," Misbah remarked.

Meanwhile, former skipper Mohammad Yousuf has blamed the Pakistan Cricket Board and the team management, especially coach Waqar Younis for the defeat.

"I don't blame the new captain, Azhar Ali nor the players. I blame those who have been sitting in power for the last many months and have made all the wrong decisions, which have today led us to this stage," Yousuf said.

"I blame all the board officials, the coaches at the national cricket academy who have done nothing to develop new players and the team management, especially national team head coach Waqar Younis," he added.

Yousuf questioned Younis's attitude.

"Today we are facing real problems because of a coach who has got a big attitude issue. If any player has any disciplinary issue he must be spoken to. That is the job of the management to ensure that the best players are motivated to play for the country," he said.

At present, Waqar is one of the most unpopular persons in Pakistan cricket and sources said that even the new selection committee was not happy with the way he had picked up the playing XI for the first two games against Bangladesh.

"Chief selector, Haroon Rasheed has already had a word with Waqar on telephone on Monday and made it clear to him that the selectors and coach needed to be on the same page," the sources said.