

SPORT



Bangladesh coach Chandika Hathurusingha (R) makes a point to his captain Mushfiqur Rahim during Tuesday's training session at Fatullah, where the one-off Test against India starts today.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Everybody's 'somebody'

AL-AMIN

Bangladesh have been playing good cricket for quite some time. The Tigers had an impressive World Cup where they made it to the quarterfinals for the first time. They followed it up with an even more impressive performance against Pakistan in their home series in which they completed a 3-0 ODI whitewash and enforced a creditable draw in the first of two Tests.

But success, as it has often been the case, brings bad blood understandably in the form of an unhealthy race among individuals or groups, who wish to dictate terms, more in an attempt to be more in the limelight.

Fortunately the Bangladesh dressing room is still quite a handful distance away from what one may term another clash of egos between the backroom staff and the selectors after the national team coach Chandika Hathurusingha referred to chief selector Faruque Ahmed as 'somebody'.

"I can't comment on somebody else's opinion. Like I said before I can't comment on the combination of the team because we haven't fixed it yet," said Hathurusingha in response to a question on whether he would go in line with the thinking of the chief selector's 'seven batsmen and four specialist bowlers' policy in the one-off Test against India.

The acid remark of the Sri Lankan during the pre-match briefing at Fatullah yesterday was primarily a rude reminder for the chief selector that his three-man panel has nothing to do with selecting the playing eleven, which is an exclusive domain for the coach, captain and his deputy.

However, it was more like a 'blow for blow' in an ongoing battle between the coach and selectors over the selection of leg-spinner Jubair Hossain. It all started when the coach asked for Jubair to take the World Cup bus which the selec-



Will leg-spinner Jubair Hossain make it into the playing eleven against India today? PHOTO: STAR

Is the AC working?

SPORTS REPORTER

"After training in the heat for so long I was looking forward to come to the press conference and enjoy the air-conditioned room. But there seems to be no difference here," a smiling Mushfiqur Rahim told reporters at Fatullah following Bangladesh's training session yesterday.

Mushfiqur's comment was directed towards the hot and stuffy media room at Fatullah which essentially lacked the most important requirements of a press conference. The air conditioners weren't working and that led to a noisy atmosphere as irritated journalists tried to make sense of the situation.

That in turn compelled journalists to literally shout out the questions in order to be audible. The veterans had to choose between wiping the sweat off their face and jotting down notes. With the Test staring today, one would have thought that the supposedly 'minor issues' would have been dealt with by now.

PAKISTAN IN SL Waqar hopeful of reaching Champs Trophy

AGENCIES, Lahore

Pakistan's coach Waqar Younis expressed confidence the cricket squad would achieve targets in Tests and one-day series as they set off for a tour of Sri Lanka on Monday.

Pakistan will play three Tests, five ODIs and two Twenty20s on their tour of Sri Lanka, with the aim of qualifying for the 2017 Champions Trophy.

Pakistan must beat Sri Lanka to get to the eighth spot or better before the September 30 cut off date for the Champions Trophy, which will feature the top eight teams.

Waqar said he believed the team would reach the Champions Trophy.

"We have set targets for Tests as well as one-day series and hope that the team does well on the tour to achieve the targets and I am confident that we will qualify for the Champions Trophy," Waqar told AFP.

Since Waqar took over in June last year, Pakistan had lost five one-day series before beating Zimbabwe at home 2-0 last month.

"As a coach there is always pressure on you, it's there even when you are winning. Unfortunately we have lost five series but you must consider a lot of factors -- the biggest of them all was losing Saeed Ajmal," said Waqar of the ace spinner not selected for the Tests against Sri Lanka.

'Batters hold the key'

SPORTS REPORTER

The last few days saw various members of Bangladesh's team management divulge their predictions regarding the Fatullah Test. Prior to Tuesday, most of the players and even the coaching staff went on air stating that a draw would definitely be a good result.

Yesterday, head coach Chandika Hathurusingha went one step ahead and stated that the Tigers were hunting for nothing less than a win. It was a more aggressive statement compared to the ones made by the likes of Heath Streak, Shakib Al Hasan, Imrul Kayes or a couple of other senior players.

What mattered most though were the words spoken by the skipper Mushfiqur Rahim at Fatullah yesterday, for it is the captain's

statement that the entire team is expected to follow.

That's what happened during the Pakistan series. The bold and positive statements made by Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and Shakib Al Hasan, both of whom believed that the Tigers could win the series, eventually seemed to have an impact on the team.

While Mushfiqur's statements aren't as direct or dominant as Shakib or Mashrafe's -- in fact he often tends to contradict himself in press conferences -- his words yesterday seemed to have reflected the general school of thought with which Bangladesh are entering the lone Test.

Forget the draws and the wins; Mushfiqur's main aim is to have as many good Test sessions as possible in the next five days.

"We have often been guilty of

giving away matches after playing just one or two sessions. This needs to change. We need to try and win those little battles. India is a very strong team and by playing against them we will know where we truly stand in Test cricket," Mushfiqur said during the pre-match press conference yesterday.

There were the usual phrases -- the 'ifs', 'buts' and 'at the same time' -- but the bottom line was clear. According to Mushfiqur, for the hosts to make a match out of this contest, they need their batting to click. It was a record stand between Tamim Iqbal and Imrul for the opening wicket that turned the game around for Bangladesh against Pakistan in the first Test in the Tigers' last Test series and the captain hopes his batters can produce similar results.

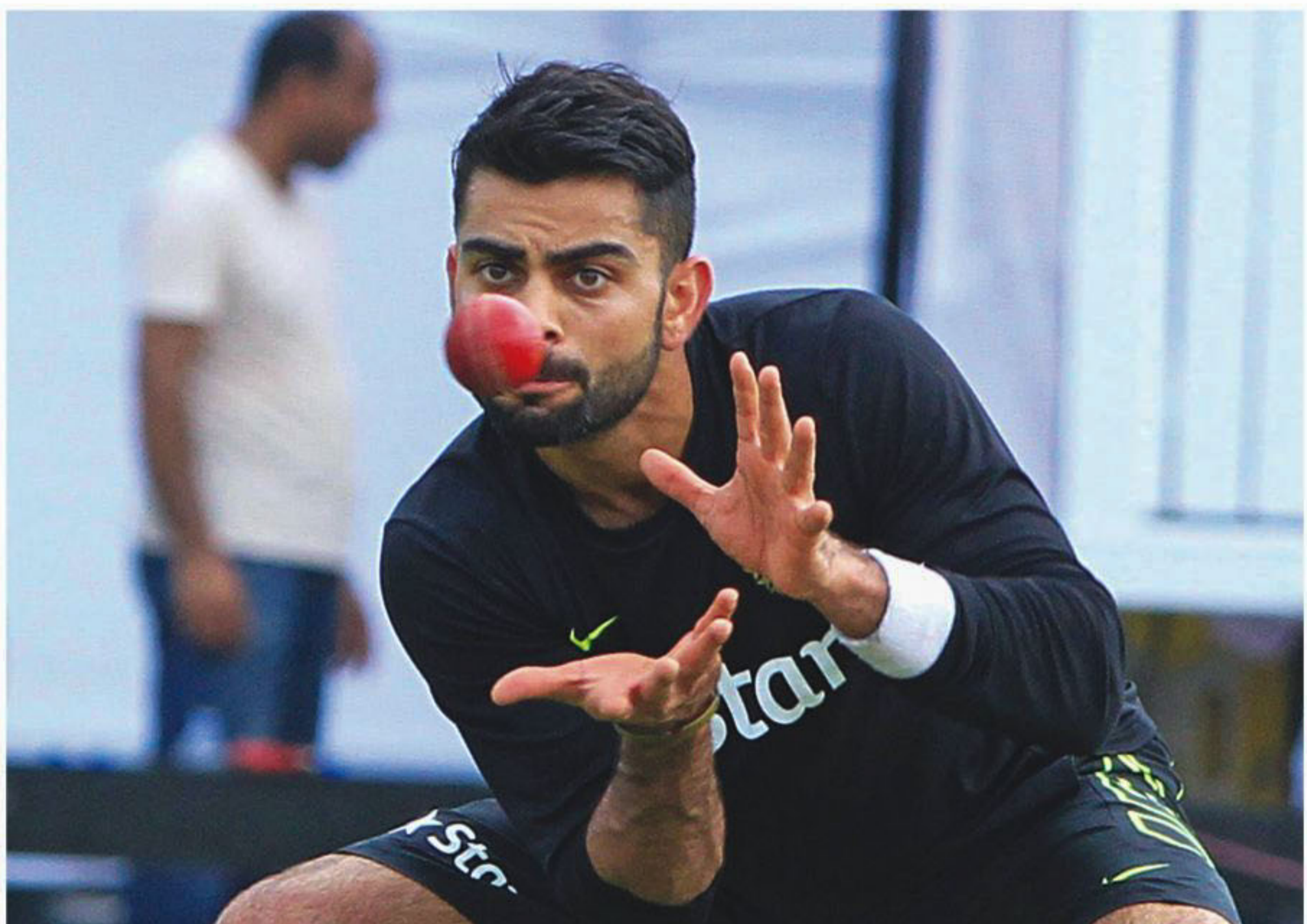
"The main duty will depend on

the batsmen. India have good spinners and it will be a challenge for them, but our batsmen are in good form. I think the first two days will be really good for batting and we will try to utilise that as much as possible," said Mushfiqur.

While the skipper initially tried to match the coach's opinion on Bangladesh's target for the match, he backed out a minute later.

"Our target is what the coach said... we will have to work hard and we will play to win. But it depends on the situation of the match... hopefully we can draw the game. We have good spinners and they can take 20 wickets," he said.

Can Mushfiqur's cautious approach outshine Virat Kohli's aggression? The fans from Narayanganj, who will witness their first Test in nine years in their own backyard, will certainly hope so.



Virat Kohli will certainly try to inject his aggressive style of batting into his captaincy in the one-off Test, which will also mark the beginning of India's Kohli era, against Bangladesh at Fatullah today.

PHOTO: STAR

The dawn of Kohli era

SPORTS REPORTER

With a new vision Virat Kohli begins his journey as a full-time India Test captain today when his side meets Bangladesh in the one-off Test at Fatullah. The hottest property of India cricket already revealed what direction he wants to take the team in Test cricket, before he left his country. He further reinforced his sentiment while he was speaking at the pre-match press conference at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium yesterday.

"It is pretty special. I never thought at 26 I would be captain of India's Test side. My only dream as a child was to play Test cricket for India. Over the years I have matured in my mind. The people around me in BCCI and my teammates thought that I was the right guy for the job. I

am pretty grateful for that. I have a vision in my mind which I have discussed with the team. We are all on the same page. It is very exciting for me to start as full-time Test captain and hopefully it will be a positive start," he said responding to questions on the start of a new era.

The 26-year old batsman captained India in the first Test during the Australia series, but he was stepping in for injured MS Dhoni at the time which is why he added: "It will be a special moment for me tomorrow (Wednesday) when I go out for the toss; something, that I will probably cherish when I finish my career."

Kohli once again made it clear that winning the Test match for India will be his mantra during his tenure, where individual achievements will hardly be cherished if they do not contribute to the team's win.

"I have some special knocks in

Bangladesh. Batting conditions are good here. You need to cash it in as a batsman. I think that's why I have made runs here. The role is different now than before. Now our mindset is to win the game without seeing personal performances. I want to contribute to the team. But my priority is to take the team towards a win," Kohli answered, when his attention was drawn to his personal success in Bangladesh in the limited-over games.

The new Indian Test skipper had given a glimpse of his aggressive character when he was asked to say something about Bangladesh captain Mushfiqur Rahim's comments, where Mushfiqur said Kohli was dangerous while leading India.

"I have enough pressure of my own to deal with. I don't take pressure from what someone has to say about me," he said.

Lewis freed

AGENCIES, London

Former England all-rounder Chris Lewis was on Tuesday released from prison after serving less than half of the 13-year sentence.

The ex-cricketer was sentenced to prison in 2009 for cocaine smuggling.

According to Lewis, a financial crisis pushed him into attempting to smuggle £140,000 worth of dissolved cocaine into the UK.

"I became afraid of what the future held, and at that point the thinking went awry," said the 47-year-old as per a BBC report.

In an interview with the Professional Cricketers' Association he said: "I made choices. They were the wrong choices and I say sorry for them."

"I've had six years in jail and until recently I would still look around and think 'wow you're in jail', that was not part of the plan. I never saw that coming."

'The wicket is unusual'

SPORTS REPORTER

It's not a very common scenario to hear the host team confessing to having absolutely 'no idea' regarding the behaviour of their pitch. However, that's exactly what unfolded in Fatullah yesterday, as both Bangladesh's head coach Chandika Hathurusingha and skipper Mushfiqur Rahim claimed to be confused regarding the nature of the wicket.

"The pitch is very hard to read. I haven't seen a pitch like this before. Looking at the wicket all I can say is that it's not going to be a fast bowlers' paradise," said Hathurusingha.

Mushfiqur echoed the Sri Lankan's thoughts and expects the ball to turn from Day One. "I feel that the game will depend upon the spinners and the batsmen," he said. Hathurusingha, who repeatedly stated

his astonishment at the unique state of the wicket, admitted that this was the first time that the team management had 'no control' over the wicket.

"There's a lot of cut-grass on the wickets. Either you have plenty of grass or you don't. But this is unusual. It's new to me, but I don't know about the others. I think the grass has got something to do with the heat and to keep the moisture for a longer period of time," said Hathurusingha.

In a similar vein Mushfiqur said, "We see cut grass on the wicket in one day cricket very often, but I don't know what effect that will have over the next five days."

"We always ask for a particular kind of wicket. It's really hot now so it's a challenge for the curators as well to prepare the appropriate wicket. Their job is difficult. But it's not as though the wicket will decide the result. Yes the wicket is a little different, but we need to play our best game," added Mushfiqur.