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RUGBY WORLD CUP IMPACT: While never a popular sport here, the Paltan Maidan was filled with roars yesterday as youths from local schools enjoyed a few very intense games of rugby during the Fiji Friendship Cup School Rugby Tournament.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Hockey in turmoil

Players boycotting camp

SPORTS REPORTER

Key players of the national hockey team did not turn up on the first day of the preparation camp for the upcoming South Asian Games at the Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protisthan (BKSP) yesterday.

Of the 54-member preliminary squad, only 26 players reported to coach Mahbub Harun while the rest of players including Pushkor Khisa Mimo, Rasel Mahmud Jimmy, Hasan Jubair Niloy, Sarwar Hossain and Kamruzzaman Rana stayed away from the residential camp.

The 26 players who joined the camp actually belong to service teams -- seven each from Bangladesh Army and Bangladesh Navy -- and BKSP.

But the majority of the players continued to boycott any national team selections to press home their valid demand of immediate players' transfer for the Premier Division Hockey League, which was last held in November 2013.

"I have been asked to start the training with the available players and the federation will look into the matter of those who did not join the training," said Mahbub.

Mahbub's remarks however will hardly change the gloomy picture of Bangladesh hockey, which is all but heading towards disaster. The players' boycott is only a tip of the iceberg in a federation that has so far failed to bring the Dhaka Premier League, the most glamorous domestic competition which is also the only source of income for the national players, back on track due to constant non-cooperation from four influential clubs.

And if the Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) continues the camp without the boycotting national players then it is destined to suffer embarrassing defeats in the SA Games, expected to take place in India next February. The crisis in the BHF is complicating with every passing day when many felt it should have been solved long ago. It appears that all parties involved in this game including the sport minister, who was supposed to do everything in his power to solve the problem, can't care less.

The players, who are starving for two seasons without the players' transfer, at the moment have little option but to press home their basic demand. At this desperate time, hockey fans want desperate efforts from all quarters to bring the game back on track.

Rubel, Taskin fighting to be fit

SPORTS REPORTER



With the arrival of Mustafizur Rahman, the Bangladesh team could breathe a sigh of relief as the Tigers' otherwise struggling pace department felt no dearth in the last few series at home. Injuries had always made the job difficult for the team think-tank and it seems there is no let-up from that as another international commitment is approaching at home next month.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is going to host Zimbabwe -- most likely in a limited-overs series -- from the first week of next month. With another series coming, the selectors are once again in a spot of bother with the pace department. Bangladesh ODI and T20I captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza is still in the hospital after being diagnosed with dengue, but BCB physician Dr. Debashish Chowdhury was hopeful of a quick recovery.

However, Dr Chowdhury doubted whether Rubel Hossain, Taskin Ahmed and Shafiqul Islam -- the trio who suffered injuries during the Bangladesh A team's tour to India -- could recover in time.



TASKIN AHMED



RUBEL HOSSAIN

"Mashrafe's physical condition is okay but his platelet count is still lower (80,000) than normal (2,00,000). We are hopeful that he will be okay very soon," said Chowdhury. "It is still too early to say, but we are doubtful whether Rubel [Hossain], Taskin [Ahmed] and Shafiqul Islam [Islam] will be available for selection if the Zimbabwe series takes place in November," he continued.

20-year old Taskin suffered a left side strain and had to return home early from the tour of India which basically hampered his dream of playing the Test cricket as the right-arm pacer missed the three-day matches in India.

"For both Taskin and Rubel we targeted the BPL [Bangladesh Premier League] for their returns. Rubel may make recover earlier though

we will get the real picture after two weeks, but there is a very slim chance for Taskin to return before the BPL," said Chowdhury.

25-year old right-arm pacer Rubel has to fight injuries to continue with the national team and recently suffered a calf muscle injury while on duty with Bangladesh A.

However, chief selector Faruque Ahmed said that they had enough time on their hands before making a final decision and also added that the current state of injuries was not a cause for concern.

"I think it is too early to say about whether Rubel or Taskin will be available for selection, but one thing is very clear; they will only be considered if they are fully fit," said Faruque.

"We have Mohammad Shahid who, we believe, can be a good option also for limited-over cricket. Hopefully he will play the limited-over matches in Bangladesh A's tour of South Africa. And since he has good record of bowling in limited-over cricket in domestic competitions, we don't want to tag him only as a longer-version bowler. At this moment Al-Amin [Hossain] is also not looking bad after returning from his long layoff. So we have the options," he concluded.

Niaz to mentor prodigy

SPORTS REPORTER



The country's youngest FIDE Master Mohammad Fahad Rahman is expected to flourish next year under the mentorship of the sub-continent's first Grand Master, Niaz Murshed, as the 12-year-old aims to become the country's youngest Grand Master.

To bring the youngest FIDE Master and veteran Grand Master under an umbrella, Mahindra Comviva -- a subsidiary of Tech Mahindra providing mobile finance and VAS solutions -- has come forward to help Fahad by signing him for a one-year sponsorship agreement.

Under the contract, Mahindra will provide a monthly stipend to the child prodigy as well as bear all expenses for Fahad's participation in international chess tournaments for one year. The company will also provide the support that Niaz Murshed will need to train Fahad.

"No Grand Master was produced in the last five to seven years in the country, while the current Grand Masters are getting older. But chess is a game for young guns. I think this type of initiative of Mahindra will put an

end to the drought of GMs in country and I believe Fahad will go forward to fulfil his dream," said Niaz Murshed at the official press briefing in a Dhaka hotel yesterday.

Fahad is ranked as Asia's 12th active player in U-12 group and 46th active player in the World in the same group. Fahad, who became FIDE Master in 2013, is one of 14 existing FIDE Masters in Bangladesh, which has only two International Masters apart from five GMs.

Niaz informed that he would work on the theoretical aspects, a weaker side of Fahad, and would try to increase Fahad's current rating of 2137 to 2250 in the next year. Fahad is expected to take part in six to eight international tournaments in one year, he added.

Reyad Hasnain, country manager of Mahindra Comviva, said, "Innovation is at the core of Mahindra Comviva's business strategy and we are always keen to work closely with people who can plan ahead by looking to the future and beyond. As chess is a game for those with an intellectual mind, we decided to contribute to its growth in Bangladesh."

State minister for youth and sports Biren Shikdar was also present at the occasion.



BOWLING									
	Mat	Inns	Runs	Wkts	Ave	4w	5w	10	
Tests	92	165	10247	311	32.94	15	11	1	
ODIs	200	197	8301	282	29.43	7	1	0	
T20Is	17	17	448	17	26.35	1	0	0	

BATTING & FIELDING									
	Mat	Inns	Runs	HS	Ave	100	50		
Tests	92	127	1231	75	11.95	0	3		
ODIs	200	101	792	34*	12.00	0	0		
T20Is	17	4	13	9	6.50	0	0		

Zaheer calls it a day

AFP, New Delhi



India's finest left-arm seamer Zaheer Khan announced his retirement from international cricket on Thursday, saying he was not fit enough to deal with the rigours of the modern game.

"With immediate effect, I bid adieu to my career in international cricket," Khan said in a statement, adding the next edition of the Indian Premier League would be his last.

"The toughest call in a cricketer's career is when one has to walk away from the game itself," Khan said.

"You almost want to push that few, extra miles but then the body, after nearly two decades, decides not to respond. As I was training for the upcoming season, it dawned on me that my shoulder may not last the rigours of bowling nearly 18 overs a day, and that's when I knew it was time."

"Cricket has been my only life over the past two decades and is the only thing I know well. I walk away with fantastic memories, life defining experiences and great friendships."

Resolute Cook leads Eng reply

AFP, Abu Dhabi



England captain Alastair Cook dished out a resolute century to lead his team's remarkable fightback in the first Test against Pakistan in Abu Dhabi on Thursday.

Cook knocked 168 not out for his 28th hundred -- fifth against Pakistan -- to anchor England to 290 for three at close on the third day on a flat Sheikh Zayed Stadium pitch.

Cook added an invaluable 116 for the first wicket with opener Moeen Ali (35) and another 165 for the second wicket Ian Bell who made a hard-fought 63.

Joe Root was the other unbeaten batsman on three as England still trail Pakistan's mammoth first innings total of 523 for eight declared by 233 runs with seven wickets intact.

Pakistan were hoping their big total would put England under pressure but Cook, regarded a better batsman against spin than his other team-mates, took the fight to the Pakistani bowlers who managed just three wickets in the day.

It could have been only one wicket but pacer Wahab Riaz (2-79) dismissed Bell and nightwatchman Mark Wood (four) in successive overs for consolation wickets.

It was Cook who took the honours with some determined batting.

He drove Riaz for an exquisite cover drive for his tenth boundary to complete his century in Tests before tea, raising his bat in celebration.

When on 93 the England skipper also completed 1,000 runs in his 11th Test this year, only the second batsman to reach 1,000 runs in 2015 behind team-mate Root.

On 101, Cook survived a confident leg-before appeal as he missed a sweep off left-arm spinner Zulfiqar Babar with Pakistan unsuccessfully challenging Australian umpire Paul Reffel's decision.

Babar was again unlucky when substitute fielder Fawad Alam failed to hold on to Cook's uppish sweep, with the batsman on 147.

SCORES IN BRIEF

PAKISTAN: First innings 523 for 8 decl (Hafeez 98, Malik 245, Younis 38, Shafiq 107; Anderson 2-42, Stokes 4-57)

ENGLAND: First innings 290 for 3 (Cook 168 not out, Moeen 35, Bell 63; Riaz 2-79)



Niaz Murshed (L) stands with Fahad Rahman, who will be under his tutelage for the next year, while a Mahindra Comviva official hands over the shirt which the 12-year-old prodigy will wear under their sponsorship.

PHOTO: STAR

WI struggle at 66 for 2

AFP, Galle



Rangana Herath dismissed both the West Indies' openers to leave the visitors struggling at 66-2 at stumps Thursday on the second day of the first Test in Galle, still trailing Sri Lanka by 418 runs.

The veteran spinner had Kraigg Brathwaite trapped leg before wicket for 19 in his second over before then sending Shai Hope packing for 23, putting the brakes on what had been a brisk fightback from the West Indies.

The visitors' hopes of saving the match now lie in the hands of two of their most experienced batsmen, Darren Bravo and Marlon Samuels, who were unbeaten at the close with 15 and seven respectively.

West Indies still face a massive task to avoid the follow-on after Sri Lanka posted a formidable total of 484 in their first innings, despite the loss of their last five wickets for just 36 runs.

The cornerstones of Sri Lanka's innings were centuries by Dimuth Karunaratne who made 186 and Dinesh Chandimal who scored 151. Their 238-run partnership for the third wicket set a new record for any wicket in Tests between Sri Lanka and the West Indies.

SCORES IN BRIEF

SRI LANKA: First innings 484 all out (Karunaratne 186, Chandimal 151, Mathews 48, Janith 23; Taylor 2-65, Bishoo 4-143)

WEST INDIES: First innings 66 for 2 (Brathwaite 19, Hope 23, Bravo 15 not out; Herath 2-14)

WHAT THEY SAID

One of the coolest pace bowlers I know. He was a bowler who could 'out think' the batsman most of the time. Always up for a challenge. I am sure he will do well as he begins a new chapter in his life. Wishing Zaheer all the success in his retired life. **Sachin Tendulkar**

If you look at Zaheer's performances he should get the respect that Sachin gets. He is the Sachin of our bowling department. **MS Dhoni**

Congratulations Zaheer on a fantastic career. Great competitor, well respected. Enjoy the next phase. **Jason Gillespie**