



Sabbir Rahman pads up ahead of his training session at the Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium in Khulna yesterday. The Tigers will hope that the aggressive batsman can hit form by the time the Asia Cup arrives.

PHOTO: STAR

Atapattu to consult Zim on BD tour

SPORTS REPORTER

Zimbabwe have appointed Marvan Atapattu as a batting consultant for their side's tour of Bangladesh, according to a report on the Zimbabwe Cricket (ZC) website.

Atapattu will join the Zimbabwe team and will consult them starting with the first Twenty20 International in Khulna on Friday.

ZC also roped in former South African bowler Makhaya Ntini on a two-year contract as assistant national team coach in charge of bowling, effective from February 16.

A point rescued

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh kept their hopes of a semifinal berth in the Bangabandhu Gold Cup alive after coming from a goal down to hold Malaysia to a 1-1 draw in their second match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Substitute Mithun Chowdhury cancelled out a 55th-minute strike from Muhammad Hadin to take the hosts to four points and to the top of Group A, ahead of Nepal on goal difference. Last edition's runners-up will need only a draw against Nepal in their third and final match for a place in the last four.

Malaysia, who are being represented in this tournament by FELDA United, are in third position with two points from as many outings and they will need an outright win over Sri Lanka to make it to the last four.

Though Mithun saved the blushes of the hosts by equalising in the 76th minute, it was goalkeeper Ashraf Islam Rana who foiled three scoring attempts from the Malaysians to be adjudged man-of-the-match.

Coach Maruful Haque gave the chance to Ashraf, playing his second international match, in place of first-choice Shahidul Alam Sohel and the Mohammedan SC goalkeeper paid off his coach's faith by putting up a brilliant performance.

"I was morally high since last night [Tuesday] after I was asked to stand under the bar. I was also mentally prepared that I would have to stop a lot of shots against Malaysia," said the 26-year-old goalkeeper.

From the outset, Bangladesh were on the back foot and survived two scares within eight minutes but the former Army goalkeeper kept the hosts in the match by foiling two efforts from Syahid Zaidan and Syamin Yahya with two outstanding saves.

It was a wake-up call for Bangladesh who then came close to taking the lead in the 20th minute, with Mamunul Islam rattling the post from a corner kick and Bangladesh looked better in the half-way of the first half but could not penetrate the Malaysian backline.

Malaysia soon regained their control in midfield to press for the lead but were again denied by Ashraf, who incredibly stopped a close-range drop-header from Shukur Adnan in the 34th minute.

Bangladesh then found a great chance to take lead against the run of play but first match's two-goal scorer Rony frustratingly drove the ball wide of target in the 35th minute.

Malaysia were denied by the woodwork four minutes before the break but they took a deserved lead 10 minutes into the second half when Hadin volleyed home a Hasni Zaidi Jamian cross from inside the box.

Maruful sent Mithun in place of Hemanta and the diminutive midfielder tapped in a low cross from Zahid Hossain to level the margin in the 76th minute. Zahid then played on substitute Jewel Rana but the right-winger saw his over-head chip blocked by goalkeeper Farizal Harun as the two teams had to be content with a draw.

'Need to know our roles' 'We have a chance'

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh Coach Chandika Hathurusingha has said that he hopes to finalise Bangladesh's T20 squad after the Zimbabwe series.

The four-match T20I series against Zimbabwe, due to begin in Khulna from tomorrow, will be the last opportunity for Bangladesh to experiment with their T20 outfit as there will be no scope for experimentation in the Asia Cup T20, which precedes the ICC World Twenty 20.

A month after the Zimbabwe series ends, Bangladesh will take part in the Asia Cup T20 and are scheduled to fly to Dharamsala to play first round of the World Cup a day after the competition is over.

"We have settled a line-up in ODI cricket but in T20s I don't think we have our combination or game-plan understood. It is the biggest challenge, especially in batting. So batsmen have to understand and be comfortable in their roles," said Hathurusingha following Bangladesh's training session at the Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium in Khulna yesterday.

"We are looking to win because we are playing international cricket. Still, we want to

get our best combination. At the same time we want to give the players comfort in their roles and time to understand their roles. So that's the main focus," he added.

That the team management is looking to experiment in the series is obvious considering that they have picked three uncapped players in the side. Abu Haider, Nurul Hasan and Shuvagata Hom have been picked mainly because of their performances in the Bangladesh Premier League and in the recent past.

"They are in the team on merit. They have done well in the recently concluded BPL and the A team tours of Zimbabwe and South Africa. Nurul is there for his explosive batting and wicket-keeping as well. Everyone thinks highly of his wicket-keeping.

"Shuvagata's strike-rate was very high. If someone comes to bat at No 7 or 8, you don't expect them to bat 60 balls in T20 cricket. You expect them to bat 10-15 balls if the other batters are doing the right thing. This will be his role and he also adds value on the field as he can bowl few overs as well. He will get a chance in this series to prove his worth," explained Hathurusingha.

"In terms of combinations, we will try to use different ones. We still want to win but we will experiment in terms of combinations, but by the time the Asia Cup arrives we will know our best combination," he concluded.

SPORTS REPORTER



Despite having gone through difficult times against Afghanistan in the UAE recently, where they lost both the ODI and T20I series, Zimbabwe coach Dav Whatmore believes that his side still has a chance to beat the Tigers in their own den.

Whatmore's confidence may stem from the fact that Zimbabwe had actually defeated Bangladesh the last time the two teams met, which was in November 2015. The two-match T20I series was drawn 1-1.

"Bangladesh is good but in this format they have got a bit of improvement to do, if I can say that. I don't like making comments about the opposition but in this format we have got a chance," Whatmore told reporters in Khulna yesterday.

"We have come here to win. We are also mindful of the fact that we have another 10 games before the World T20. A portion of those games will be used to look at different combinations," he added.

The Australian described the setback in the UAE as a bit unlucky and expects his boys to do much better in Bangladesh.

"The last game was one of those days.

But the one before that we chased really well. We were unlucky. We fell just five runs short chasing 190-odd. There were a lot of positives, but the last one was not our night.

"The ODI series could have gone the other way as well. We bowled them out for 130 in the first match but couldn't get to it; second match we got 250 and one person wins the game for them. It could have been 2-0 in our favour. At the end of the day, it was 3-2. They have improved," explained Whatmore.

Like Bangladesh, the Zimbabwean team will also be doing a bit of soul searching in this format of the game with the T20 World Cup around the corner. This series will no doubt provide the Zimbabweans with an idea regarding the kind of conditions they may have to battle in India.

"I am not sure Indian wickets are going to take too much spin. What I have seen in the IPL are good batting wickets. Some of the matches are also under lights so the dew factor will also come into it. I think teams need to be prepared for medium-pace-quick combinations and also the ability to use spin bowlers without damaging their batting. I think you need to be flexible," said Whatmore.



CHANDIKA HATHURUSINGHA



DAV WHATMORE

Final line-up completed

SPORTS REPORTER

Amol Roy and Anwar Hossain set up a final showdown in the men's singles of the Victory Day Tennis Competition, which is being held at the Ramna National Tennis Complex in Dhaka.

Amol beat Ranjan Ram in three sets (1-6, 6-1, 6-2) while Anwar overcame Mamun Bepari, also in three sets (1-6, 6-4, 6-2), in their respective semifinals yesterday.

In the women's singles, Shah Safina outplayed Rebeka Sultana (6-2, 6-1) in the second semifinal to set up a final clash against Afrana Islam Preety, who had beaten Ayesha Sultana (6-2, 6-3) in the first semifinal on the previous day.

Liton, Kapali steadfast

SPORTS REPORTER



Liton Das followed suit after Abul Hasan's five-wicket haul as East Zone made a good reply against Central Zone on the second day of the Bangladesh Cricket League's (BCL) first round match at the Shahid Chandu Stadium in Bogra yesterday.

Central Zone lost their remaining five wickets after adding 91 runs to the overnight score of 303 as Sharifullah posted three digits after resuming the day on 89, while captain Mosharraf Hossain scored the lion's share on the day, contributing 39 runs unbeaten. Hasan scalped two more wickets yesterday.

Mominul Haque along with Shadman Islam made a confident start but the left-handed batsman was dismissed by Shahidul Islam for 33 runs. Central Zone got their opponents into trouble by taking two more wickets but Alok Kapali joined Liton to finish the day on high note, sharing an unbeaten 82-run fourth-wicket stand.

At the Shahid Kamruzzaman Stadium in Rajshahi, South Zone finished the second day's play trailing by 161 runs with five

wickets in hand after North Zone were bundled out for 392 runs. After Farhad Hossain, overnight batsman Ariful Haque also completed his hundred while Shohag Gazi and Abdur Razzak claimed four wickets each.

Fazle Mahmud's 70 helped build South Zone's innings but a lot will depend on the two batsmen at the crease; Taibur Rahman and Farhad Reza.

SCORES IN BRIEF	
CENTRAL ZONE V EAST ZONE	
CENTRAL ZONE:	394 all out in 116.2 overs (Marshall 76, Tanveer 129, Sharifullah 113, Mosharraf 39 not out; Hasan 5-68, Jayed 3-89, Rabbi 1-79, Nazmul 1-69)
EAST ZONE:	170 for 3 in 55 overs (Shadman 14, Mominul 33, Liton 61 not out, Tasamul 21, Kapali 31 not out; Shahidul 2-46, Sharifullah 1-34)
NORTH ZONE V SOUTH ZONE	
NORTH ZONE:	392 all out in 113 overs (Mushukur 30, Farhad 106, Ariful 115; Tawhidul 1-33, Gazi 4-111, Razzak 4-162, Enamul 1-48)
SOUTH ZONE:	231 for 5 in 72 overs (Nafees 25, Fazle Mahmud 70, Tushar 47, Taibur 36 not out, Farhad 41 not out; Shafaq 1-29, Nasir 1-25, Tajjul 1-62, Sunzamul 1-61)



Bangladesh forward Mithun Chowdhury (2nd from R) runs to celebrate as Malaysia goalkeeper fails to thwart his strike during their Group A fixture of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: BFF

Bangladesh U-23s upbeat

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Olympic team are looking forward to building on their first match performance when they take on Maldives in their second Group B outing at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today.

The match will get underway at 6:30pm after Bahrain take on Cambodia in the first match of the day at 3:30pm.

A win will take the Bangladesh team close to the semifinals of the eight-team tournament, thanks to

their 1-1 draw against Bahrain in the opening Group B fixture last week. As things stand now, SAFF Suzuki Cup semifinalist Maldives are on top of the group with three points due to their 3-2 win over Cambodia, while Bangladesh and Bahrain occupy the second spot with one point each.

The charges of Gonzalo Sanchez Moreno are seemingly upbeat ahead of the Maldives clash, and want to ensure their semifinal berth by beating the islanders, who had beaten the Bangladesh seniors 3-1 in the SAFF Suzuki Cup last month.

"We all are positive about tomorrow's [Thursday] game because we

don't have any alternative but to win if we want to play in the semifinals. We are hopeful of giving our hundred percent like the first match," said captain Rezaul Karim, admitting that Maldives are a stronger opponent than Bahrain.

Reza informed that they have watched the video footage of the match between Maldives and Cambodia and found out the weak links of the opposition and that they would be trying to play accordingly.

Assistant coach Syed Golam Jilani informed that winger Rubel Mia, who sustained a hamstring injury, may miss today's match but they would wait for him till morning.

U-19s eye series win

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Under-19s will aim to confirm the series when they take on the visiting West Indies Under-19s at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong today in the second game of the series.

The home team thrashed the visitors by eight wickets in the first game at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

The third and final match will take place at the same venue on January 16.

Bimal sinks Lankans

SPORTS REPORTER



A youthful Nepal notched their first victory in 28 months when they handed a 1-0 defeat to Sri Lanka in the Bangabandhu Gold Cup at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Bimal Gharti Magar struck the all-important goal in the first half to give the Himalayan kingdom their first win since a 2-1 win over India in the 2013 SAFF Championship in Nepal. It was also a sweet revenge for Nepal, who were eventually eliminated from the group stages of last month's SAFF Suzuki Cup largely due to a 1-0 defeat against Sri Lanka in their opening match.

The win took Nepal to four points and

second position in Group A as Bangladesh lead the table with same number of points but having a superior goal difference after holding Malaysia to a 1-1 draw in the day's second match. Malaysia have two points while Sri Lanka, who had suffered a 2-4 defeat against the hosts on the opening day, are out already of the race for the semifinals.

Sri Lanka enjoyed better ball possession but they could not recover from conceding the lead in the fourth minute. Rabin Shrestha ran down the left to provide a nice cut-back for Bimal, who side-volleyed to put Nepal ahead.

Afterwards, Sri Lanka dominated the game and created three good chances to equalise but Kavindu Ishan, Madushan De Silva and Sajith Kumara failed to hit the target from close range.