

SPORT



The Tigers went to the National Bangla High School's Shaheed Minar in Mirpur yesterday to pay respect to the language martyrs on the momentous occasion of International Mother Language Day. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

'Nothing more to do but execute'

SPORTS REPORTER

Asia Cup T20
From a month-long Bangladesh Premier League to a T20 series against Zimbabwe, which was followed by specialised T20 training camps in Khulna and Chittagong, this format has been so ingrained into the Bangladesh national players that one wonders if there's any other preparatory measure they need to take.

overs against Zimbabwe and with the Mirpur wicket expected to provide plenty of bounce, things could get interesting. "I think our pace attack has done well throughout 2015. In tournaments like the Asia Cup, the ICC will have a big say. So I believe the wickets will be quite sporting," said Mashrafe. "But considering the kind of position that we are in terms of ranking, we really can't depend just on one department. We have to improve in all three departments. It's not possible for us to focus on just one aspect," he added.



MASHRAFE BIN MORTAZA

And so when a calm Mashrafe Bin Mortaza told reporters that there was not much that the Tigers could do in the last three days leading to the Asia Cup, it did not come as a surprise. "We can't really do anything new in these three days. One can't change his technique or learn something different in such a short time. We have practised a lot in the last one-and-a-half months and that is what we are counting on. If we are lucky, we can implement the plans that we tried in practice during the games," said Mashrafe prior to the national team's training session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

In terms of rankings, Bangladesh need to progress quite a bit in this format. However, considering their rise in the last year and the fact that the tournament is taking place in Dhaka, many actually believe that the hosts could reach the final. Former Pakistani greats Inzamam-ul-Haq and Aqib Javed indicated that a few days back. Mashrafe however was not thinking about any of that. All he wants his side to do is

play good cricket. "I don't believe that we are going out there to prove something to someone. We represent Bangladesh and we will try to play well for as long as possible, because that's what we believe in. And within this period, both good and bad things may happen."

"Our mental belief is really good at the moment. If we can replicate that feeling on the ground, a lot of good things can happen for us," said Mashrafe.

With five pacers in the 15-member squad, one does not need to be an expert to suggest that the Tigers could depend a lot more on their pacers in the upcoming tournament. In fact, they have depended upon them throughout 2015.

Before training yesterday, on the occasion of the International Mother Language Day, the national team paid their respects to the martyrs of the Language Movement by visiting a Shaheed Minar at the National Bangla High School in Mirpur.

The three-man spin attack with specialist turners was a norm that was broken last year and the squad this time around is expected to depend a lot more on the likes of Mustafizur Rahman and Al-Amin Hossain. The duo looked quite good in the death

'We have all the ingredients'

India, Sri Lanka arrive in Dhaka

AGENCIES

Asia Cup T20
The Indian cricket team, led by skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni, arrived in Bangladesh last night to play the Asia Cup T20 in Dhaka. Sri Lanka had arrived earlier in the day, while Pakistan will be the last team to arrive on February 24.



MAHENDRA SINGH DHONI

The Asia Cup will be quickly followed by the ICC World Twenty20, starting in India on March 8. The Asia Cup T20 will serve as vital T20 preparation for the mega event for all the teams involved. Team India have already

got into the groove with T20 series wins over Australia and Sri Lanka and Dhoni expressed satisfaction with the preparation and said they've the right ingredients to do well in the Asia Cup.

"The good thing is we played three games in Australia then we played against Sri Lanka. It gave us the time to settle into the format. It's always easier to switch from T20

in the Asia Cup in order to get their balance right. "We will try to give everybody a

game. It's important to play as a settled team. It's important to give everyone a game but we will look to win the games and that's our priority. From the team's perspective, it's important to make sure you keep repeating your performances and do well for the team and enjoy the team," he said.

India will launch their Asia Cup campaign against Bangladesh on February 24.

"I've the belief and talent required to win a big tournament. This team has all the ingredients. It's important to keep everyone fit. Ultimately you have to go and do well on the field that's what it is all about."



Mohammed Shahzad powered the UAE to a six-wicket win over Hong Kong in their Asia Cup T20 Qualifier at Fatullah yesterday, smashing a 39-ball 52 to take his side home with nine balls to spare. PHOTO: STAR

UAE knock Hong Kong out

Qualifier to be decided today

SPORTS REPORTER

Asia Cup T20
The Khan Shaheb Osman Ali Stadium in Fatullah yesterday witnessed the first contest of the Asia Cup T20 Qualifiers that was not decided in the last over when the United Arab Emirates romped to a six-wicket win over Hong Kong. The victory has placed the UAE in prime position for a slot in the main round and has also eliminated Hong Kong from the race.

At the moment, UAE have four points from two matches, while Hong Kong have zero from two. The final round of the Qualifiers today will confirm the fifth participant of the Asia Cup.

Afghanistan, who have two points from two matches, will take on Hong Kong in the afternoon. Asghar Stanikzai and Co will need to win that match by a

large margin in order to keep their hopes of a spot in the main tournament alive. In the evening the UAE will take on Oman, who have two points from two matches. If Oman wins, they will have two points as well and that is when the run-rate factor will come into play. If UAE win, they will go through with an all-win record. As a result, both sides will be desperate for a win.

Batting first, Hong Kong put up a below-par 146 for seven. They were pegged back by wickets from Mohammad Naveed and Amjad Javed, who finished with figures of 3 for 14 and 2 for 21 respectively. Had it not been for Babar Hayat's 54 off 45 deliveries, the men from the Gulf would have been in further trouble. Babar played a cautious knock that helped them rebuild and in the process hit eight boundaries. However, once the set batsman departed there was barely any resistance from down the

order. The UAE stuttered a bit at the start of their chase with the player-of-the-match of their first game Rohan Mustafa getting dismissed in the second over. They lost Mohammad Kaleem in the third over and suddenly found themselves at 22 for 2. However, a 79-run stand between Mohammad Shahzad and Muhammad Usman for the third wicket ensured that there were no further hiccups.

Shahzad smacked a 39-ball 52 and hit four fours and a six while Usman hit a cautious 39-ball 41. Shaiman Anwar came towards the end and scored an 18-ball 25 to take UAE home in the 19th over.

SCORES IN BRIEF
HONG KONG: 146 for 7 (Babar 54, Chapman 29; Naveed 3-14, Amjad 2-21)
UAE: 147 for 4 in 18.3 overs (Shahzad 52, Usman 41; Nadeem 1-17, Chapman 1-24)

Fraser lifts Maybank title

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Marcus Fraser of Australia clinched the title of the inaugural Maybank Championship in Malaysia by two shots yesterday for a six-year title drought. The 31-year-old Aussie signed off with a three-under-par (68) for a 15-under-par (279) winning total, earning him a champion's cheque of 500,000 dollars.

Bangladesh's Siddikur Rahman finished in joint-150th position after a one-under-par (70) in the final round yesterday for an aggregate score of one-under-par (283).

The 31-year-old exchanged four birdies for three bogeys on Sunday for his second under-par round in this event.

Aslam blasts BFF, Mamunul

SPORTS REPORTER

Former national footballer Sheikh Mohammad Aslam cited the lack of a positive working environment inside the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) and the attitude of some of the current national players as reasons for his resignation from the executive committee. The former striker, who had been part of the committee since 2008 and headed the SAFF debacle probe committee which made some damning allegations against a few national players, tendered his resignation on Saturday.

"Mamunul [Islam] recently made some allegations against me in media. Mamunul said that since I am a member of Sheikh Jamal DC and that he left the club, I suggested disciplinary measures against him, which is not true at all," the former striker told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Everyone knows I'm not even involved with policymaking of the club and I don't attend the club meetings. What Mamunul said is baseless and I think it is a bid to tarnish the image of former players like us.

We have overlooked many transgressions of these players and I guess that is why they are now showing the audacity to raise fingers against us. So I wanted to leave the federation with whatever dignity I still have," said a seemingly frustrated Aslam.

The former footballer also claimed that the BFF had failed to come up with a proper policy to take the game ahead.

"I tried to mobilise the Dhaka Metropolitan School Football League, but due to the indifference of the federation, I had to backtrack. The federation has failed to present a proper football policy before the country which is why the game is going backwards. Even the BFF president has always tried to keep us sidetracked," alleged Aslam.

"The federation is now trying to amend its constitution by making government officials ineligible to contest its polls, which is a suicidal decision. In a country like ours, sports need the government's involvement and patronage," said Aslam, who is himself a government official.

However, Aslam said that if the right environment and opportunities return, he would be willing to contest in the upcoming

Burns, Smith lead charge

AFF, Christchurch

Century-makers Joe Burns and Steve Smith shredded the New Zealand attack to have Australia in charge of the second Test, before both fell in the dying stages of day two in Christchurch on Sunday.

Burns hit a career best 170, his third century, and Smith made 138, his 14th, as Australia ended the day at a commanding 363-4 in reply to New Zealand's 370.

After Brendon McCullum's 145-run blitz gave New Zealand the first day honours on a green, seaming wicket, Burns and his captain Smith ensured the momentum swung Australia's way as the pitch flattened out.

Burns spent a lot of time successfully fighting off Neil Wagner's short-ball tactic before eventually pulling one to Martin Guppill at square leg with 28 balls left in the day. Five balls later, in a repeat scenario, Guppill gave Wagner his second wicket and Smith was gone.

Adam Voges was on two with Nathan Lyon, sent in as nightwatchman, on four.

Until Smith's dismissal, the only moment of concern in his classy innings came when he was felled by a fearsome Wagner bouncer in the last over before tea.

He lay prone on the ground for a few moments, but as the New Zealand players rushed to his aid, Smith staggered to his feet and after medical attention he resumed his innings with a single off the next ball.

The Burns-Smith partnership produced 289 runs, an Australian third-wicket record against New Zealand.

SCORES IN BRIEF
NEW ZEALAND: First innings 370 (McCullum 145, Anderson 72, Watling 58; Lyon 3-61)
AUSTRALIA: First innings 363 for 4 (Burns 170, Khawaja 24, Smith 138; Boult 2-85, Wagner 2-63)



Australia opener Joe Burns (R) celebrates his century with captain Steve Smith on the second day of the second Test against New Zealand in Christchurch yesterday. PHOTO: AFP