

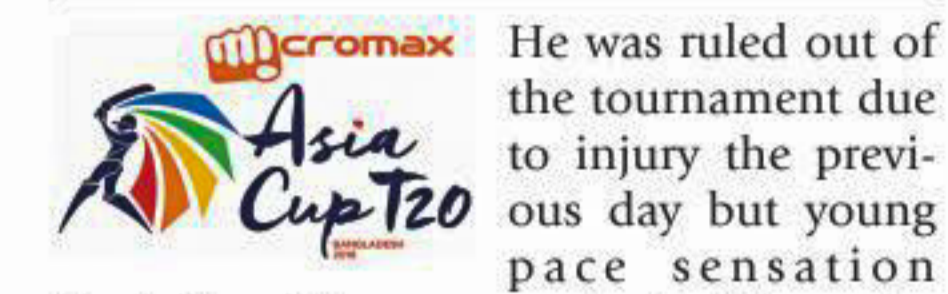


PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED
Bangladesh skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza shares a light moment in training with Soumya Sarkar at the BCB Academy Ground in Mirpur yesterday.

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Mustafizur's absence also an opportunity

BISHWAJIT ROY



He was ruled out of the tournament due to injury the previous day but young pace sensation Mustafizur Rahman remained at the centre of discussions ahead of Bangladesh's crucial match in the Asia Cup T20 against Pakistan at Mirpur today. The loss of a bowler like Mustafizur was obviously a setback for the home side, which is why captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and coach Chandika Hathurusingha did not hide their frustration while speaking to the press yesterday. No one would want to have to do without their premier bowler in a crucial match. Even if you put aside the team interest, with Mohammad Amir expected to steam in to the bowling crease for Pakistan, no passionate lover of the game would want to miss a battle between two top-class bowlers. So it is a loss for both spectators and the home side.

But every cloud has a silver lining. Playing without Mustafizur creates a chance for Bangladesh to enhance their self-belief and reputation -- a good team cannot depend on an individual.

One could not disagree with Hathurusingha when the Sri Lankan said: "It's very hard to say if the other bowlers can do what Mustafizur is doing. As you know he is an exceptional talent. I am sure others will do what they can do well, that's what I am hoping."

One would also not mind when Mashrafe went so far as to say that there is no one in world cricket who could take the 20-year-old's place. Then, the country's most successful skipper might have reflected the spirit of a true team when he said: "Now we are not thinking about his

absence; instead we are looking forward to ensuring the best performance from our available resources."

And over the last few years the Tigers have increasingly proved that they are not dependent on any individual to bring success. When Bangladesh ushered in a new dawn by inflicting a 4-0 whitewash on New Zealand in 2010 without the presence of dashing opener Tamim Iqbal, the belief started to develop that to become a force in world cricket they should ensure that they will not depend on any individual and have the requisite back-up resources.

Without inspirational all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, Bangladesh achieved two famous ODI series victories against West Indies and New Zealand in the years 2012 and 2013 respectively, and it was not long ago as the Tigers posted a massive 79-run victory against Pakistan last year without charismatic leader Mashrafe that paved the way for three historic series wins against sub-continental giants -- Pakistan and India -- and the mighty South Africa. Let us also not forget that the Tigers' pace bowling now excites cricket-watchers without the presence of Rubel Hossain; a trusted bowler who has had some outstanding performances in famous wins.

Mustafizur is the most vital ingredient in Bangladesh's recent emergence as an exciting pace attack in world cricket. The 20-year-old left-arm seamer had noteworthy contributions to his team's consecutive wins against UAE and Sri Lanka in the tournament after an ordinary start against India, so his services will no doubt sorely be missed, but the Tigers must keep up the true team spirit that they have so painstakingly created, regardless of who is playing in Mustafizur's place.

Mash, Hathuru eye another landmark

NAIMUL KARIM



Transcending boundaries isn't something that this group of Bangladeshi players aren't used to. Under captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and coach Chandika Hathurusingha the Tigers reached several new landmarks in ODIs last year.

And when they take on Pakistan today in the crucial Asia Cup fixture at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, it will be another opportunity for them to surpass yet another boundary.

To be able to reach the final in a format where they are ranked tenth will no doubt be a big feat. While both the coach and the captain are confident, in the back of their minds they know that it will take plenty

of effort to beat a T20-hardened Pakistani outfit.

"Lately we have done many things that we had never done before. We never beat Sri Lanka in a T20I before this tournament. So for us there's always hope," said Hathurusingha during Bangladesh's training session in Mirpur yesterday. Captain Mashrafe echoed the coach's sentiments.

"Wins and defeats lead to many different perceptions. However, what I believe is the step-by-step process. If we keep taking these small steps, we will soon be able to be a lot more competitive in this format.

"It's not just Sri Lanka. I thought we were on track against India as well. It's just that we couldn't hold on till the end," said Mashrafe.

"Towards the end against Sri Lanka, Angelo Mathews, who is a very capable batsman, was still there. But we didn't panic. We kept our heads cool at that point of time. I am not sure what these

wins signify, but I know that we are on the right path," he added.

If the hosts want to reach a new landmark, they will need their batsmen to come to the party. And that's why, despite Mustafizur Rahman's absence, both the coach and the captain were glad to see Tamim Iqbal return.

"I am happy with Sabbir [Rahman] and [Mahmudullah] Riyad. But what's important is that we get at least three to four batsmen scoring in every game. In T20 cricket it's very hard to score consistently.

"Tamim will go straight into the opening slot so there's no concern. With regards to Mushfiqur [Rahim], it is a bit of a concern because he is our best batsman and I hope he makes a comeback," said Hathurusingha.

Bangladesh will replace Mustafizur with either pacer Abu Hider or one of two spinners -- Nasir Hossain and Arafat Sunny.

Rakibul ton drives Central Tigers' warm-up match cancelled

SPORTS REPORTER



The performance of the first day of the fourth round of the Bangladesh Cricket League, the country's premier four-day competition, came from Rakibul Hasan. The former national player scored an unbeaten 119 to guide his side Walton Central Zone to a commanding 321 for four against Islami Bank East Zone when stumps were drawn at the Sheikh Kamal International Stadium in Cox's Bazar yesterday.

His century is the fourth 100-plus score in the last two rounds of the BCL, with three coming in the previous round.

A patient Rakibul faced 216 balls and scored eleven boundaries. After Central Zone chose to bat they lost two early wickets and were reduced to 81 for two. That is when Rakibul joined hands with Marshall Ayub and put on a 154-run stand for the third wicket.

While Marshall missed out on his second century as matches after getting out for a 140-ball 81, an innings which included eight fours and a six, Rakibul kept up his concentration

and stayed till the end of the day.

For the Mominul Haque-led East Zone, Mohammad Saifuddin and Rahatul Ferdous took two wickets each.

Runs did not flow as much in the day's other game between Naeem Islam's BCB North Zone and Abdur Razzak's Prime Bank South Zone. North Zone were restricted to 266 for eight by the end of the day. However, they only managed to reach that score because all-rounder Muktar Ali, batting at number nine, smacked a 60-ball 43 towards the end of the day. What was better is that he stayed unbeaten as well and North Zone will hope he can continue with his shots on Day Two and increase their first innings total as much as possible.

He smacked a six and five fours and as a result, North Zone recovered from 79 for four.

Skipper Naeem and wicketkeeper Ariful Haque also played fighting knocks of 48 and 43 respectively.



RAKIBUL ...119 not out

SCORES IN BRIEF

NORTH ZONE: 266 for 8 (Naeem 48, Ariful 43, Muktar 43; Taibur 2-32, Gazi 2-49) v **SOUTH ZONE**

CENTRAL ZONE: 321 for 4 (Rakibul 119 not out, Marshall 81, Zabid 47; Saifuddin 2-59, Rahatul 2-111) v **EAST ZONE**

SPORTS REPORTER



The International Cricket Council (ICC) has decided to cancel Bangladesh's practice match against Hong Kong in Dharamsala on March 5, which was supposed to be the start of Bangladesh's ICC World T20 campaign. According to an ICC press release sent on Monday night, Hong Kong will face a local team instead of the Tigers.

The reason behind the cancellation is that Bangladesh, having beaten Sri Lanka in the Asia Cup, have a chance of making it to the final of the tournament, which is due to take place on March 6.

Even if the Tigers lose their game against Pakistan today, they will have to wait till March 4 -- when Pakistan will face Sri Lanka -- to ascertain whether they have been eliminated or not.

On the other hand, a win today will confirm their place in the final. Either way they will have to stay in Dhaka till March 4, so playing a practice match in Dharamsala the very next day will not be a plausible option.

The cancellation though isn't bad news. The Tigers have been practicing for the last few months keeping in mind the seaming tracks in Dharamsala. That is also a reason why the Asia Cup has witnessed tracks that have had plenty of grass and bounce.



PHOTO: STAR
Dashing left-handed opener Tamim Iqbal will be looking to make an instant impact and resolve the top-order issues when Bangladesh take on Pakistan in a crucial Asia Cup T20 encounter in Mirpur today.

IMPACT MAN



KOHLI'S CALM

Virat Kohli once again proved a class above the rest as he hit a cool and collected 56 to guide India to the Asia Cup final. Two quick wickets left India at 16 for two, but Kohli hardly batted an eyelid as he took no notice of a green pitch and went about scoring runs, building crucial partnerships first with Suresh Raina and then with Yuvraj Singh. He hit seven fours and ended the match with a down-the-track whip to the midwicket boundary that underlined his class and importance to the Indian line-up.

No Indo-Pak clash in Dharamsala?

PTI, New Delhi



The much-awaited India-Pakistan World Twenty20 clash is in jeopardy after the Himachal Pradesh government expressed its inability to provide security for the match, leaving the BCCI in a bind with Board Secretary Anurag Thakur saying that the state should not "play politics".

The March 19 game is to be played in Dharamsala but its fate is now uncertain after Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister Virbhadra Singh wrote to the Home Ministry stating that the state government cannot provide security for the match.

Reacting sharply to Singh's statement, Thakur, who is also a BJP MP in Lok Sabha, said the state knew of the schedule months ago and did not specify any concerns at that time.

"The venues of the World Cup matches were decided one year ago, the allotment of matches was decided six months ago. People all over have made bookings and it is not fair to give such statements at the last minute," Thakur told reporters.

"The Congress-led state government is clearly playing politics. Hundreds of Pakistani athletes were given security during the South Asian Games in Assam, why can't the Himachal government do the same?" Thakur asked.

"By claiming that you cannot provide security, you are only giving credence to Pakistani claims that there is a security threat to their team in India. It's about the country's image, you cannot play politics over it," he added.

On Monday, the Himachal Pradesh Congress had asked the BCCI to either cancel the proposed match or shift the venue. The party claimed that since Kangra is home to a large number of soldiers hosting the Pakistani team would hurt the sentiments of martyrs' families.

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BANGLADESH			PAKISTAN		
M	W	L	M	W	L
12	0	12	12	12	0

IN ALL T20IS

M	W	L	M	W	L
8	1	7	8	7	1

Last meeting: Dhaka, 24 April 2015, Bangladesh won by 7 wickets.

KEY PLAYERS

TASKIN AHMED	MOHAMMAD AMIR
6	23
4	29
37.25	20.03
7.09	6.91
1-24	3-18
0	0
0	0

Mash's name used illegally

SPORTS REPORTER

An organisation named 'SME Loan Services' has been unethically linking itself to Bangladesh ODI and T20I captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza. In an appointment letter obtained by the media and signed by K.T. Ahmed, the president of the company, it was written that the organisation had made Mashrafe the president of its advisory committee.

Speaking to the media however, the Bangladesh captain established that he had never spoken to a representative or the official and had no clue regarding the whereabouts of the company.

"Let me make this clear: I have never even heard of this company, let alone talking to any of their representatives. It's not right if they try to use my name for their benefit," said Mashrafe.

When contacted, an official from the company admitted that they hadn't spoken to Mashrafe as yet but were preparing to approach him.