

SPORT

Series gaps a concern

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All eyes in the cricket arena are now on the coming England series. Bangladesh in 2016 are experiencing a drought of international cricket after a wonderful 2015 that even saw cricket in the monsoon season. If and when the England team arrive in September it will re-launch the Tigers into a busy schedule as there are a number of international engagements in the coming months.

But what is the case for the rest? The Bangladesh A team last played international cricket in November last year when they visited South Africa and Zimbabwe and the board is yet to confirm any assignments for them. "There is no question about the importance of arranging international matches for the Bangladesh A team. We have a big chunk of players outside the national team and we must create opportunities for them so that they can push the players in the national side," said Akram Khan, Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) director and chairman of cricket operations committee.

"We are trying hard to arrange some series for the A team," he added.

The Bangladesh Under-19 cricket team had a busy journey till the ICC Under-19 World Cup at home early this year. The BCB is now working with a new bunch of players who are currently in a residential camp at the BKSP.

"The Under-19 team will play the Asia Cup in December. We don't have any bilateral series at this moment but we have a plan to arrange series with New Zealand as the next World Cup will take place there, and also a series against England. And we will also try to arrange series against Sri Lanka," said BCB's development committee chairman Khaled Mahmud.

Nazmul Abedin Fahim, BCB's national game development manager, informed about the activities of the different age level teams.

"We are now working with a new group of players in the Under-19 level and they are practising at the BKSP. The Under-19 camp will run till the first week of next month and then they will play matches among themselves. The Under-17 team is likely to go to BKSP for training camp after the departure of the Under-19 side. A large number of Under-15 players are now in Khulna where they are playing longer-version matches," said Fahim.

"Basically it's not always possible to arrange bilateral series for the Under-17 and Under-15 teams but still we have been playing with India for some time. At the junior level the most important thing is arranging matches at home. On the other hand the Under-19 team played the World Cup this year and now we are working with new players. In September they will play matches among themselves before the Asia Cup. The board is also working to arrange international series," he continued.

Fahim also informed that the Academy team had toured long ago and they are yet to arrange anything for them. "You know, the High Performance team is now in training and they are scheduled to play three-day matches in Sylhet and Dhaka."

The Bangladesh Women's Cricket team, meanwhile, is going to Ireland next month to play two T20Is and as many ODI matches.



Bangladesh football coach Tom Saintfiet (L) conducts a training session for the national team's upcoming Asian Cup play-off qualifiers against Bhutan at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Saintfiet weighing options

SPORTS REPORTER



Midfielders Hemanta Vincent Biswas and Atiqur Rahman Fahad have been recalled to the preliminary squad of the national football team as Jamal Bhuiyan will miss the home match of the Asian Cup Play-Off Qualifiers against Bhutan due to his international suspension.

Jamal, who seems to be in the best form of his life in the domestic circuit, has been an essential midfield component from the moment he made his international debut in Nepal during the 2013 SAFF Championship and has hardly ever missed the chance to don the red and green jersey since.

And even though Bhutan has never beaten Bangladesh in past fixtures, the omission of the defensive midfielder will surely serve as a

huge drawback to the national team.

"We have been together for the last three years so we will definitely miss Jamal, who is unparalleled in his position at the moment. There is no better defensive midfielder than him. If anyone playing in his place can perform better, then the team will be much benefited," said captain Mamunul Islam, who missed training yesterday due to a left thigh muscle strain.

Mamunul also feared that Jamal's absence will be felt by head coach Tom Saintfiet as he wished to apply the 4-3-3 attacking formation in which Jamal played as a holding midfielder. This formation has been used before by the previous coach, Lodewijk de Kruijff.

However, it seems that Saintfiet may now adopt the 4-4-2 formation instead.

"We added two players because I was informed yesterday that Jamal Bhuiyan may not play. So I wanted to take another player in

that position, I wanted Hemanta to come back to have more quality in the training and more options as well," said Saintfiet after the training.

The Belgian also hinted that he might have called up a few more new players but added that he is handicapped to choose from a maximum 28, who attended the week long training camp he conducted last month, for his final 23-member squad.

"I'm sure a big part of the players from last month [training] will be in the group of 23, but some players will be included when they prove to be ready. So it will be very balanced squad. Actually the majority will be from the first squad. I'm sure about that," said Saintfiet.

Meanwhile, South African fitness trainer Riedoh Berdien joined the national camp and attended two training sessions yesterday but refused to comment on the fitness level of the players.

Sheikh Russel held by Tatung

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Sheikh Russel KC managed to carry their poor domestic form into the international level as they surrendered the lead and played out a 1-1 draw against Tatung FC of Chinese Taipei in the AFC Cup Play-Off Qualifiers at the Changlimithang Stadium, Thimphu, Bhutan yesterday.

Cameroonian Jeans Jules Ikanga gave Sheikh Russel the lead in the 32nd minute with a left-footed volley from inside the box after a weak clearance by Tatung goalkeeper Sheng-Hsin Wei.

Sheikh Russel looked better on the pitch with the inclusion of four guest players. Rubel Mia and Mohammad Ibrahim caused all sorts of trouble down both flanks while defenders Nasir Chowdhury and Yeasin Khan confidently guarded the backline.

However, Yeasin was the man who awarded their Chinese counterparts an 80th-minute penalty by bringing down Jui-Chieh Chen inside the box, which Shih-Cheng Hung then converted.

Sheikh Russel now desperately needs a win over Bhutan's Tertons FC on Thursday to qualify for the play-off rounds.

Players may be given choice: Morgan

CRICINFO, London

England ODI captain Eoin Morgan has indicated that individual players will be given the choice of whether they want to tour Bangladesh in October. The England one-day squad is due to be given a security briefing on Thursday by the three-member delegation that recently returned from the subcontinent.

Test captain Alastair Cook, will also attend the meeting in London, travelling from Leicester where he is involved in a county match for Essex. The one-day squad would depart for Bangladesh first, leaving on September 30, followed by the Test squad.

"The briefing will be Thursday evening, with head of security Reg Dickson, a rep from the PCA and John Carr from the ECB," Morgan said. "They've been doing the reccy and we'll be debriefed by them. Alastair will be there and other guys who are available will come."

"They'll debrief us on the findings on both tours and we'll chat about it, it has to be quite open. People have missed tours in the past so you have to make guys feel safe to go. It's a decision you'd rather get out of the way sooner rather than later. There's always room for a personal decision, you also have to understand guys might have different priorities."

Former stars in new league

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Bangladesh's cricket fans will get an opportunity to witness their former cricketers stars once again when they take part in the Walton Masters Cricket Carnival Powered by Scan Cement.

The former players have been divided into six teams: Lanka-Bangla All Stars led by Salim Shahed, Ispahani Chittagong Masters led by Akram Khan, Jaj Bhuiyan Dhaka division led by Naimur Rahman, Confidence Group Dhaka Metro led by Khaled Mahmud, Gemcon Group Khulna led by Habibul Bashar and Renaissance Rajshahi led by Khaled Mashud.

The inclusion of former cricketer Shariful Haque Plabon -- banned for an indefinite period by the Bangladesh Cricket Board for spot-fixing in the Bangladesh Premier League -- in the Rajshahi team stirred controversy during the opening ceremony of the tournament at Mirpur yesterday.

When asked about the issue Khaled Mahmud indicated that this was not a tournament organised by the BCB. He however, said that he would discuss the issue with the board before allowing Plabon to take part in the league.



Bangladesh Test skipper Mushfiqur Rahim (R) attacks the stumps during one of the many fielding drills that the national team took part in at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

A fabulous fifty

AL-AMIN

Here is a jigsaw puzzle. Who is the longest serving sport journalist, writer or columnist in Bangladesh? Struggling? Let's make it a bit simpler. That gentleman completed a unique half-century in the field of sports journalism on Tuesday. Need more clues? He is a confirmed bachelor, a virtual encyclopedia of Bangladesh sport and the first staff reporter (sports) of a popular Bangla daily, which had dedicated a full page for sport in a time when others simply ignored it.

The gentleman, who completed that unique piece of history reflecting on those eventful years probably at his worn-out Jhulonbari abode in the old part of the city, is Muhammad Quamruzzaman whom we respectfully address as Zaman Bhai.

A witness of many firsts, Quamruzzaman started his illustrious journey as a sports reporter of Dainik Pakistan in 1967. And after the War of

Liberation when the daily turned into Dainik Bangla, Quamruzzaman played the pivotal role in promoting the country's fledgling sport. It was also at that time when many young sport scribes, like yours truly, followed the sport page of the now defunct daily for not just updating ourselves with local sport but also international events at a time when sport news was very hard to get.

He served the daily as its sports editor till its last days in 1997. Sport in every newspaper, portal or TV channel in the country is not only an integral part now but also financially viable if not very lucrative. But to be honest it is Quamruzzaman and his famed team that set the tone for the next generation to take up this profession seriously. A Dhaka University Bleu,

Quamruzzaman is still writing and attending cricket or football games at the age of 77. An inspiration for many of today's famous sport writers, Zaman Bhai and his half-century at least deserves to be acknowledged if not cheered.



QUAMRUZZAMAN

Durban Test drawn

AFP, Durban

The first Test between South Africa and New Zealand at Durban ended in a draw Tuesday after poor conditions prevented play, setting up a series-deciding final match beginning at the weekend.

No play took place after rain fell during the lunch break on the second day on Saturday, when New Zealand were on 15 for two in reply to South Africa's first innings total of 263.

Rain fell throughout the rest of Saturday and into early Sunday morning and further play was ruled out on days three, four and five because of a wet, soft outfield which the umpires decided would be dangerous for players.

British paper casts further doubts

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A report on British newspaper The Telegraph's website has cast further doubts over England's scheduled tour of Bangladesh in October. The security concerns, according to the report published on The Telegraph's website late on Monday, was with travel within the cities of Dhaka and Chittagong rather than the hotels where the team will stay or the grounds where they will play.

The report also revealed that the fate of the tour is 'expected to be decided this week and to hinge on the England and Wales Cricket Board security advisor Reg Dickson'.

A three-man security delegation -- security advisor Reg Dickson, Professional Cricketers Association chief executive David Leatherdale and ECB's director of cricket operations John Carr -- from the ECB left Bangladesh last Saturday after a four-day inspection of the relevant areas, and the buzz regarding the tour in Bangladeshi cricket circles was a positive one at the time of their departure.

Security doubts were first cast over the tour in the aftermath of the July 1 terrorist attack on the Holy Artisan Bakery in Gulshan which claimed the lives of 20 civilians

and two police officers.

Although not quoting any member of the security delegation directly, the report did say that "It is understood that Dickson's chief concern is not so much the hotels where England will be staying in Dhaka and Chittagong, or the grounds in those two cities, as they can be cordoned off by the police and military."

Barmy, willing and able

Meanwhile, English cricket fan group Barmy Army, members of which are regular and boisterous fixtures wherever England play, has contacted the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) to inquire about the logistics if and when they arrive.

"They contacted us asking about where they can stay during the tour and we told them about hotels where they will get adequate security," BCB media committee chairman Jalal Yunus told The Daily Star yesterday.

The Barmy Army are a semi-organised fan group, and it seems their eagerness to see some action is not diminished by security fears. In that, they have much in common with the Bangladeshi fan.

"The most potentially dangerous parts of a cricket tour are the journeys from the airport to the team hotel, and from the team hotel to the ground, especially in crowded Asian cities where it is humanly impossible to secure all the buildings overlooking the roads."

The security team were given every assurance of safety by the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) and concerned government agencies. It has also been learnt that those within the Bangladesh cricket establishment draw confidence in security provisions from the safety arrangements that have been offered to teams in the past -- during the numerous bilateral series hosted here and also multi-national events like the Asia Cups (2012, 2014 and 2016), the 2014 World Twenty20, the 2011 World Cup, etc.

"The ECB has not told us anything officially, so we cannot make any comments," said BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury when asked about the report in The Telegraph.

The England cricket team are not strangers to playing in volatile regions. In November 2008 they were playing an ODI series in India -- an Asian country -- when the Mumbai terror attacks took place. The two remaining ODIs were cancelled but England, having gone home immediately after the incident which included assaults on five-star hotels Taj Mahal and Oberoi, returned for the two Tests a fortnight later. The second Test was shifted from Mumbai.