

# SPORT

AFGHANS IN TIGERS' DEN



There was only an optional practice session scheduled at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday but head coach Chandika Hathurusingha turned up along with a host of players which included Mosharraf Hossain, who learned that he would be in the team for the Tigers' third and final ODI against Afghanistan on Saturday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Mosharraf brought in for spin boost

SPORTS REPORTER



It is not often that teams train in the morning following a day-night encounter. So when the Bangladesh national team decided to start training at 11:00 am yesterday following their defeat to Afghanistan, in a match that ended at approximately 10:30 pm on Wednesday, a few eyebrows were raised.

Was the management compelled to take such a strict measure due to the defeat at the hands of the Afghans? Not quite.

Soon after the Tigers started training yesterday morning, the motive was clear. The training session was optional and only a few players had arrived. It was mainly meant for the players who had been rested in the last game: Imrul Kayes, Nasir Hossain and Shafiqul Islam. It was mandatory for Mosharraf Hossain, who replaced Rubel Hossain in the squad for the third ODI, as well.

Unsurprisingly though, Mushfiqur Rahim joined the four players, but seemed to have a separate training session. While the rest of the four players were busy with their net sessions at the Mirpur indoors, Mushfiqur was busy with his own routine at the other end of the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

It is nothing new for Mushfiqur to attend optional training sessions. In fact, not many can recall the last time the wicketkeeper-batsman missed a training session.

He was the first one out, doing his warm-

ups on the main ground in Mirpur. Perhaps this is his way of getting over rough times, for he did have a torrid game against Afghanistan on Wednesday. Not only did he throw away his wicket after being set, he also fluffed a stumping chance at a crucial point in the game.

However, Mushfiqur was not the talking point yesterday.

Thursday belonged to 34-year-old Mosharraf Hossain, who stands a good chance of returning to the playing eleven after a gap of eight years. The last time he played an ODI was against South Africa back in March 2008. He was picked in the 20-member ODI pool after Venkatapathy Raju, the former Indian spinner who had come to Bangladesh for a week as a spin consultant, recommended the slow left-arter.

With Rubel struggling for rhythm in the first two ODIs, the team management decided to replace him with the spinner.

A delighted Mosharraf, who has 339 first-class wickets and 74 List-A wickets, said that he was surprised to get the call.

"At the moment, there's plenty of competition in the national team and there are many slow left-armers as well. So, that is why I was a little surprised when I got the call. But this feels great," Mosharraf told The Daily Star yesterday.

"International cricket is very challenging and the situation we are in right now, it will make things more difficult. We lost the last game and so I am sure with spinners dominating, I will have to take a lot more responsibility if I get the chance. I hope to do my best," he added.

## Eng to arrive tonight

SPORTS REPORTER

The most anticipated series in recent times will be set in motion today when the England cricket team arrive tonight to play two Tests and three ODIs. The team is scheduled to land at 8:00 pm at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport amidst heavy security.

It therefore was not a surprise that the press release sent by the Bangladesh Cricket Board stated that there would be no media interactions at the airport.

England have suffered a setback even before landing in Bangladesh, however, as their highest Test wicket-taker James Anderson and fellow pacer Mark Wood will miss the tour due to injuries.

England will begin the tour with a warm-up one-day game against a BCB XI side at the Khan Shaheb Osman Ali Stadium in Fatullah on October 4.

The ODIs come next. The first two ODIs will take place at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur on October 7 and 9. After that, the teams will travel to Chittagong to play the final ODI at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong on October 12.

The players will remain at the port city to play the first Test which is scheduled to

FIXTURES			
Date	Match	Venue	Time
Oct 4	Warm-up	Fatullah	10:30am
Oct 7	First ODI	SBNS	2:30pm
Oct 9	Second ODI	SBNS	2:30pm
Oct 12	Third ODI	ZACS	2:30pm
Oct 14-15	Warm-up	MA Aziz	10:00am
Oct 16-17	Warm-up	MA Aziz	10:00am
Oct 20-24	First Test	ZACS	9:30am
Oct 28-Nov 1	Second Test	SBNS	9:30am

being on October 20. Prior to that, England will play two two-day warm-ups from October 14 to 17 versus a BCB XI side.

The teams will then return to Dhaka to play the second Test from October 28 to November 1 at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

So far, England and Bangladesh have played 16 ODIs with England winning 13 of those and Bangladesh winning three. However, Bangladesh beat England the last two times the teams faced each other.

England have won all the eight Tests against Bangladesh. The last time they played Bangladesh in the longer version was back in June 2010.

## Did clear thinking expire in 2015?

SAKEB SUBHAN



There was a reason why Bangladesh fans were so eager for the ODI series against Afghanistan and England to start, and that was to see the Tigers continue the scarcely believable run of success they had in the format in 2015. So, after a near 11-month gap between ODIs behind them, the point of interest surrounding the series against Afghanistan was whether Bangladesh can build on the success of a year ago. Then, Bangladesh had turned around an abysmal series of results in 2014 with a clear-minded, simple approach that resulted in them being one of the most impressive ODI sides of 2015.

So has that clarity of thought carried over into 2016? From the evidence of a series poised at 1-1 that could easily have been 2-0 in favour of Afghanistan had it not been for a certain Shakib Al Hasan, the answer is in the negative.

Some might say it is too early to determine, but consider the evidence. In 2014, the new firm of coach

Chandika Hathurusingha and skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza identified the 2015 World Cup on the pace-friendly pitches of Australia and New Zealand as the opportunity to make a splash. After years of reliance on spin bowling, the new wave of Bangladesh cricket advertised a growing strength in pace in the likes of Rubel Hossain, Al Amin Hossain, Taskin Ahmed and the man who started it all -- Mashrafe.

The order of the day therefore was sporting pitches with a bit of grass that provided pace and movement, at the same time rewarding the natural stroke-players in the batting department. The result was a team that was more able to compete on the world stage and beat such varied opponents as South Africa, India and Pakistan at home. It all went very well with a coach and captain insistent on playing to the team's strengths regardless of opposition.

11 months on, inexplicably, the slow and low pitches of a weaker Bangladesh have returned. It is inexplicable because the home team's squad does not match the pitches, which are widely known to be prepared according to the team management's suggestions. There

are four fast bowlers in the squad and three playing in the team. The stroke-players, apart from losing their patience too soon, have found it hard to score the big runs they scored in 2015.

This muddled thinking is not restricted to the pitches. This series is also the first where the new selection procedure has been in effect, and the first impression has not been a good one. Critics of the new procedure -- which has included the team manager, cricket operations committee chairman and head coach in the squad selection process -- have labelled it a convoluted one while lamenting the exit of previous chief selector Faruque Ahmed, whose strong-minded views were thought of as a valuable counterbalance to equally strong voices within the management.

Opener Tamim Iqbal has reinvented himself as someone who looks to bat deep into the innings from his earlier incarnation as an early-over swashbuckler. This was in part due to his partner Soumya Sarkar's explosive exploits in 2015, but the opener has since been

confounded by poor form to an extent that is affecting those around him. But he has been persisted with -- a team policy that somehow does not apply to Imrul Kayes who finds himself playing in the troublesome number three position as often as not. The reasoning is that Soumya played well in ODIs 11 months ago, and his recent failures in domestic cricket are ignored. Meanwhile pacer Al Amin, who performed excellently in last year's ODIs, finds himself out of the squad and his replacement Shafiqul Islam has not seen action yet. Muddled thinking and double standards abound.

There are no obvious reasons for this reversion to second-guessing, especially after a year as productive as 2015. Right now only speculation is possible, and one theory doing the rounds is that there may be a fear that England, with their newfound aggression, would find sporting pitches to their liking and pile on 350-plus scores like they have been doing in England. If that is indeed the case, then the coach, captain and powers that be are reverting from fearlessness to timidity, a move that may render 2016 an anomaly rather

## Subroto Cup BKSP U-14s clinch title

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protisthan (BKSP) emerged as champions in sub-junior boys U-14 section of the Subroto Cup in India with a 4-2 win over a Chandigarh school in a penalty shootout at the Dr. Ambedkar Stadium in New Delhi yesterday.

The match rolled into shootouts after regulation and added time failed to produce any decider, according to the tournament's official Facebook page.

In the sub-junior group some 36 schools -- including four from Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Malaysia -- took part in the 57th edition of the Subroto Cup. Bangladesh were placed in one of eight groups along with West Bengal, Sikkim, Goa and TAFS and emerged group champions to advance to the quarterfinals.

Previously, BKSP had beaten Esteqal High School from Kabul (Afghanistan) 4-2 in penalty shootout in the semifinal to move into the final.

## Kolkata Test starts today Kohli shrugs off rankings pressure

AFP, Kolkata



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India could regain the number one position if they win the second Test starting in Kolkata on Friday and clinch the three-match series.

But Kohli said he was not motivated by records, despite India being just one point behind archrivals Pakistan in the International Cricket Council Test rankings.

"Number one doesn't matter for us because it is temporary," the skipper told reporters.

"If you get attached to these things then you get upset you are not able to do it. It's better to observe from far on things that are not directly in our control."

India toppled Australia at the top of the rankings after their recent series win against the West Indies, only to be leapfrogged by Pakistan. India are now hopeful of returning to number one before Pakistan play three Tests against the Windies in October and November.

Kohli was noncommittal about whether Gautam Gambhir would play in Kolkata after he was spotted in the nets late on Thursday, following the veteran opener's inclusion in the squad after a two-year absence.

Spin twins Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja bowled India to victory on Monday in Kanpur, but Kolkata's iconic Eden Gardens is not expected to offer as much spin.

"The surface is pretty nice, it has a little bit of grass covering. It should be a good wicket to bat on," said Kohli, who had a disappointing time at the crease in Kanpur.

Kohli also said India would probably introduce the Decision Review System (DRS) after India's cricket board appeared to soften its opposition to the umpiring system if some changes were introduced.

"We will certainly look to probably introduce it in future," Kohli said.

"Those things I can't say yes or no sitting here. We have discussed. We have had meetings about it. There are some areas (that) can be debated, especially ball tracking and hawk-eye."

New Zealand opener Tom Latham welcomed the apparent change of stance from India, saying the system reduced human errors.

## Mamunul in 33-member squad

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh coach Tom Saintfiet yesterday included three new faces as he announced a 33-member preliminary squad for the national team's AFC Asian Cup Play-off Qualifiers against Bhutan. Winger Mohammad Ibrahim and strikers Saad Uddin and Sarwar Zaman Nipu were the new faces in the team which also contained nine old guns, including former captain Mamunul Islam.

Saintfiet dropped three players --

striking pair Nabib Newaj Jibon and Mehdi Hasan Tapu and defender Ariful Islam -- from his 23-member final squad which played out a goalless draw against Bhutan in Dhaka on September 6. Bangladesh will take on Bhutan on October 10 in Thimphu, while the camp will start from Saturday.

Saad and Nipu, the striking pair of the under-16 national team were surprisingly called up to the national fold for the first time, although Saad and Nipu are bench players for Abahani and Sheikh Jamal respectively, while Ibrahim has been playing regularly for Chittagong Abahani.

The 43-year-old coach also called-up veteran midfielders Mamunul, Enamul Haque, Sohel Rana, Sohel Mia and Masuk Mia Zoni, defenders Yeasin Khan and Yeamin Munna, goalkeepers Maksudur Rahman Mustak and Mohammad Nehal and veteran striker Zahid Hasan Emily.

"I am now fully focused on our next professional football league match against BJMC because a win will take us close to the league leaders. However, I am happy that I have been called up again, but I will take a decision on whether to join the national camp after the match against BJMC," said Chittagong Abahani captain Mamunul Islam.

## SA-Aus first ODI today

AFP, Centurion

Australia's fast bowling reserves will be put to the test during a five-match one-day international series against South Africa starting at Centurion on Friday.

The world's leading one-day team will be without an entire battery of top-class pace bowlers when they take on their fourth-ranked challengers.

South Africa still have a strong batting line-up, however, led by Quinton de Kock, Hashim Amla and stand-in captain Faf du



Khulna Titans captain Mahmudullah Riyad was present along with officials at the team's logo launching ceremony at a city hotel yesterday. Meanwhile it was informed that Stuart Law would be the team's coach.

PHOTO: STAR