

SPORT



The two pillars of Bangladesh cricket, Tamim Iqbal (L) and Shakib Al Hasan, will once again be the men in focus and will play a major role in the Tigers' fate when they begin their series against England with the first ODI at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur at 2.30pm today.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

MATCH VITALS

BANGLADESH **ENGLAND**



HEAD TO HEAD

3	OVERALL (16)	13
1	IN BANGLADESH (7)	6
3	LAST 5 MATCHES	2

KEY PLAYERS



TAMIM IQBAL		JOS BUTTLER
156	MATCHES	78
4931	RUNS	2072
32.44	AVERAGE	38.37
78.5	STRIKE RATE	120.32
VS ENG 125	HIGH SCORE	VS BD 65

'Firstly, thank you England' Mirpur turns mock war zone

BISHWAJIT ROY



Oh! If only Mustafizur Rahman was here. It is but natural that the magical pacer will be dearly missed when the Tigers embark on another big challenge at home today.

Although the new-look Bangladesh team negates the dependence on any particular player, the cricket crazy fans of the country have been so engrossed with one mystical performance after another from the 21-year-old right-arter from Satkhira that everyone will miss watching Fizz in what would have been his first battle with England.

However, that disappointment will have to stay on the sidelines as there is a broader significance to this series. Roughly eight hours before a winner is decided in the first of three ODIs in Mirpur today, cricket will already have won a bigger contest when Bangladesh take the field against the visiting England side at 2:30pm.

Whether the visitors win or lose, they deserve plaudits in advance as it was the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) and its players who upheld the spirit of the game by confirming their visit, overcoming all security fears and thereby winning the hearts of the millions of cricket fans in the country.

That is the reason Bangladesh ODI and T20I captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza did not miss the opportunity to thank England at the pre-match press conference in Mirpur yesterday.

"First of all I would like to thank the England team and ECB obviously," the skipper said.

For Bangladesh there will be many things to prove in the three-match ODI and two-match Test series. So far, the organisers have left no stone unturned in ensuring maximum security for the visitors and a successful ending will be a huge message to the world.

It is a series where we can again prove how loving we are towards our guests, something we have earlier proven on a number of occasions.

And when it comes to the battle over 22 yards, there are also many challenges which the Mashrafe-led team will need to overcome if they want to show the world that 2015 was no fluke. Instead they will demonstrate that they are on the right path -- especially in their favoured 50-over format -- to becoming a major force in world cricket.

During a marathon press conference the Tigers skipper probably best described what was

waiting in the upcoming matches as he showed full respect to his opponents, branding them as one of the best ODI teams at the moment. However, he also exuded full confidence in his side and said he was anticipating a good battle throughout the series.

"Obviously it will be difficult to say who the favourites are. The series will be competitive," was the simple equation from the brave-heart cricketer, under whom Bangladesh have achieved one success after another. As has now become customary, Mashrafe emphasised the importance of the first match of the series.

The home team can take a lot of inspiration

performances," he said, lavishing praise on his opponents and adding that they were still a good team despite the absence of a few regular players.

On the other hand, if someone wants to bring up statistics in favour of England, which show that they have won 13 ODIs out of 16 against Bangladesh, Mashrafe will simply tell you: "We are now playing good cricket. Our main target is to be consistent in our performances."

And at a time when there has been a lot of talk about what kind of pitch would be best to thwart England, Mashrafe's observation in this regard reflected the truly positive mindset of the team.

"If you have followed Bangladesh wickets for



from their recent encounters against England, especially their memorable World Cup win in Adelaide last year, but Mashrafe was not ready to go down memory lane. Instead, he wanted to take the series as a fresh start for his side and he considers this the biggest challenge to his team as they aim to prove that they are consistent and have the ability to win series against England after dispatching Pakistan, India and South Africa at home in the recent past.

"I think we beat England in Australia in the World Cup about one-and-a-half-years back and after that England have changed. They have played like a champion team if you look at their

the last two years it hasn't turned as much. We played on quite sporting wickets and our batsmen have batted really well. I think you cannot just focus on spinners or pacers. As far as my team is concerned I can say that our whole department is playing really well so I think we rely on all the departments. When we played against South Africa on a slow wicket we struggled in the first one-day but after that there was a good wicket. I believe that if it's difficult for us it will be difficult for them as well."

As things stand, all cricket fans can look forward to an exciting battle and the success of cricket over the next few weeks.

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The Bangladesh national team were supposed to begin their training at 10:00am yesterday at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur. Their sessions were expected to be the highlight of the day, considering that the ODI series against England begin today.

However, the morning rain delayed their on-field training sessions and the main ground was completely covered. The attention as a result shifted to the men in uniform, who were present in large numbers yesterday.

At around 10:30am the security agencies were getting set to perform a security drill.

The 1 Para Commando Battalion, the Army Aviation Wing, the Bangladesh Air Force and a number of other security agencies took part in the demonstration.

As part of the demonstration, four Para Commandos climbed down from a helicopter that was hovering over the BCB's national cricket academy and took their respective positions on the ground at 11:00am.

Minutes later, another helicopter, from the Bangladesh Air force arrived carrying four more Para Commandos and together, the eight Para Commandos headed towards the England dressing room at the main ground of the stadium.

The mission of the drill was to save the so-called hostages, played by other Para Commandos, from the England dressing room at the main ground. The Para Commandos charged into the main ground, performed a mock shooting drill and then took the hostages back to the helicopter at the national cricket academy.

Lt Colonel MM Imrul Hasan, the commanding officer of the 1 Para Commando Battalion spoke to the media following the demonstration.

"You all know that a series is going on between Bangladesh and England cricket team and so for the security purpose this is an arrangement we made. It's just a demonstration including all the stakeholders.

"I want to mention that the Bangladesh Army, and to be particular the 1 Para Commando battalion, is always ready to take on any situation to safeguard the players," he said.

The England and Wales Cricket Board's chief security officer, Reg Dickason was present during the entire demonstration.

"What we have witnessed today has been a graphic demonstration of the response capability of the Bangladesh army and the response units. It gives us a lot of confidence for touring your wonderful country.

"The security that we have experienced to date in Bangladesh has been outstanding," said Dickason.

Security drills shock Buttler

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England captain Jos Buttler was not present at the ground when security personnel, equipped with firearms, performed a full evacuation drill.

However, he did view the scenes -- which included members of the security dangling on ropes from helicopters and storming the stadium and firing blank shots, before removing men posing as members of the England cricket team from the premises.

With the security issue dominating headlines ahead of the tour, this was the first time the England side got a glimpse of the kind of measures that were prepared. And the sight left Buttler in a state of shock.

"I was actually watching the news back at the hotel and saw the pictures. It was quite eye-opening and something you hope we'll never have to see in reality. It's a shock and it's sad that such security has to be there," Buttler was quoted as saying by English newspaper The Daily Mail.

However, Buttler did say that his side were firmly focused on cricket and not the issues surrounding their tour.

"Everything has been in good order since we got here. Travel to and from the ground has been great for us although I'm sure it's been a bit frustrating for the locals. Certainly our guys are very settled and focusing on the cricket."

Raina recalled for NZ ODI series

REUTERS, New Delhi

Batsman Suresh Raina has been recalled into India's one-day international (ODI) squad for the five-match series against New Zealand this month.

The 29-year-old, who last played an ODI for India in 2015, was overlooked by selectors for India's ODI tour of Australia earlier this year, the tour of Zimbabwe in June and the Twenty20 squad for the two matches against West Indies in August.

Spinners Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja and fast bowler Mohammed Shami will be rested for the first three matches of the series.

'Not thinking about rankings'

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Talk regarding Bangladesh's World Cup qualification resurfaced in the last week.

That was mostly because Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan Papon, in a couple of recent press conferences, had said that there is a good chance that Bangladesh will not have to play the World Cup Qualifiers regardless of the results of the series in the next year, since as per the ICC's ranking policy, Bangladesh are likely to remain in the top eight.

In order to avoid playing the World Cup Qualifiers for the 2019 World Cup, Bangladesh needs to remain in the top eight until September 30, 2017. They are currently ranked seventh.

When Bangladesh ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, during the pre-match press conference in Mirpur, was asked if this

revelation had given the team a sense of comfort he said: "No, actually we are not thinking about that."

"Even if our qualification is confirmed, it doesn't mean that we will win the World Cup," he added with a smile.

He further said that the team were only focused on the three-match ODI series at the moment.

"We can't look too far. This current series is very important for us. If you think about what will happen one year from now, then it will create unnecessary pressure.

"We are thinking about tomorrow's game. If we can do well tomorrow we will have passed one more day successfully. That's how we are thinking. No matter what happens outside, we are focused on this series."

"It's not as though we don't want to qualify directly. Of course, anyone will want to qualify directly. But we don't want to create unnecessary pressure for ourselves," the skipper said.



Head of Bangladesh's opening match against England, security personnel performed an evacuation drill at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR