

SPORTS

'First 10-15 balls crucial'

SPORTS REPORTER from Chittagong

With the Test poised on a knife edge, the feeling that permeated the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium yesterday after the end of the fourth day's play was one of being grateful for having been there.

The denouement was still in the offing, although it would have to wait for the morning session today -- 33 runs for home ecstasy and two wickets for the tourists to complete a win that they have fought tooth and nail for.

When such a game of cricket unfolds, unless there are unusually high levels of rancour between the sides, opponents become co-actors in a spectacle rather than mere adversaries, and that was reflected in coach Chandika Hathurusingha's words after the day's play.

"This is one of the best games I have watched. I am very pleased with the performance of both teams," said Hathurusingha.

"I am really happy that they [Bangladesh] took 20 wickets. It was a positive," he said. "I am happy to be still in the game in the fourth day against a team like England. I don't think anyone gave us a chance four days ago. We had a good game plan. We would like to have done better in the first innings."

The churlish would say that Hathurusingha himself did not give the team much of a chance to win as he said before the squad was announced that winning would be a bonus and seemed sceptical then of the team's ability to extract 20 wickets. With the benefit of hindsight however, he along with skipper Mushfiqur Rahim probably deserves much of the credit for devising a strategy that was executable by the resources at hand. When one considers that Bangladesh are playing their first Test in nearly 15 months and England their 17th in that period, their achievement becomes all the more impressive.

"We prepared well. Bowlers have proved themselves and we got a wicket that we think suited our strength. Tactically we played a good game. We got the combination on this kind of wicket.

"I am a bit disappointed that we could have been ahead of the game in the first innings, more than what we are now. We are chasing the lead that we conceded in the first innings," said Hathurusingha, alluding to the 45-run first innings deficit which was a result of Bangladesh's only poor passage of play -- the hour and six minutes on the third day which saw their last five wickets fall for 27 runs.

Hathurusingha was full of praise for the steel debutant Sabbir Rahman showed in batting out the day and scoring 59 on a very tough pitch. Bangladesh's hopes now rest on Sabbir and Taijul Islam, who added 15 runs and saw out the day when all hope seemed to be lost when the eighth wicket fell with the score on 238.

"When Taijul went in to bat, we needed 46/47 runs, which we couldn't score in 5 or 6 overs," explained the coach. "Best scenario was to bat them out and take the game to the fifth day. Now the challenge is to bat as long as possible tomorrow, and hoping we will win.

"Our batsmen have to bat the first 10-15 balls, and they have to come and get the wickets. We have 90 overs to bat."



Both Bangladesh captain Mushfiqur Rahim (R) and debutant batsman Sabbir Rahman almost plotted a famous victory on the fourth day of the first Test against England at Chittagong yesterday. Although Mushfiqur was undone by an almost unplayable delivery, Sabbir can still be the hero when he comes out to bat today along with Taijul Islam for a small (!) matter of 33 runs with two nery wickets standing.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

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Mushy proves his point

SAKEB SUBHAN from Chittagong

There was not much hope coming into this match. It was not just the longest gap between Tests in Bangladesh's 16-year history that caused the pessimism; it was pretty much everything surrounding Bangladesh's Test cricket. By the coach's own admission Bangladesh were not a side known for taking the 20 wickets required to win a Test match and even asked us not to expect miracles. They were led by a captain who did not seem to be the one to take Bangladesh to the next step. He was also suffering from indifferent form with the bat in the limited-overs matches the side played this year.

But the man that people doubted has proved to be the catalyst for a turnaround. England may take two wickets and Bangladesh may well lose the first Test on the fifth morning of the first Test in Chittagong today, but more than can be gleaned from the scorecards has already been achieved by the team, and in particular, Mushfiqur Rahim.

As captain he was instrumental in formulating the strategy that has put Bangladesh in a position to win their first Test against an opposition other than the trouble-beset Zimbabwe or a depleted West Indies side in 2009. While those seven victories mean a lot to the newest Test team, if

Bangladesh pull this off it will rank as the country's greatest cricketing achievement bar none. Even if they do not, it will have signalled a seminal match in which Bangladesh finally found their Test identity and their actual home advantage.

If proof be needed that he was instrumental, one need not look much further than his captaincy on the field. Gone



PROUD TO BE A PART OF THE NATION'S PRIDE, THE PADMA BRIDGE!
ANWAR CEMENT

were the passive fields set to contain. There was not a moment in the match when Bangladesh were not trying to take wickets; there were close-in fielders even during Ben Stokes and Jonny Bairstow's 127-run sixth wicket partnership on Saturday. Further proof is his allusions to a special plan before the match; which apparently was to unleash his

spinners on England on a dustbowl and count on his batsmen to bat better than the English in the conditions.

While the first of that two-part plan was executed with his aggressive captaincy, he was central to the second aspect yesterday as well. His innings of 124-ball 39, when he batted for 168 minutes on what both sides have called one of the most difficult pitches they have seen, will go down as one of the great rearguards. No ball until the treacherous one that got him out was too much trouble for him reminding us why he -- the country's first double-centurion -- was not long ago regarded as Bangladesh's best Test batsman.

His shepherding of the young and precociously talented Sabbir Rahman proved no less crucial during their 87-run sixth-wicket stand. He illustrated the home advantage through Sabbir, allowing him to go after the spinners to set the cat among England's pigeons. He also reined Sabbir in against the reverse swinging ball, and the youngster has been batting in the way of his captain, raising hopes of the 'miracle' the coach talked of.

Even if Bangladesh lose, they have competed tooth and nail each and every hour with England except one hour on the third morning. The story should however be that a team with only seven Test victories have shown an undying will to fight in the toughest of circumstances. In that they have

'Among my top 5 Tests'

SPORTS REPORTER

England pacer Stuart Broad, who has played 99 Tests so far, has dubbed the ongoing Chittagong Test as one of the most exciting Tests that he has ever played. Speaking to reporters after yesterday's topsy-turvy day he said that it would be difficult to predict the result of the match but that both teams should be proud of the way they played.

"It's a fantastic Test match to be a part of. They need 33 runs. We need two wickets. As a bowling unit, you will tell yourself that you need two good balls. Who can have the character? Who can be the match winner to be able to bowl two unplayable deliveries or beat the batsmen's defence or test the batsmen's ego.

"I think Bangladesh have played fantastically well. The Test has been up there in probably top five for me to have played in exciting wise and look I have played 99 games and I know that I am going to be worried for two or three hours tonight. It is good fun," said Broad after the day's play yesterday.

He also indicated that it would be an advantage for the visitors to resume the contest again today morning.

"From our point of

view it's good to go back to the hotel get some rest and be refreshed. The batsmen have to play themselves in again," said Broad.

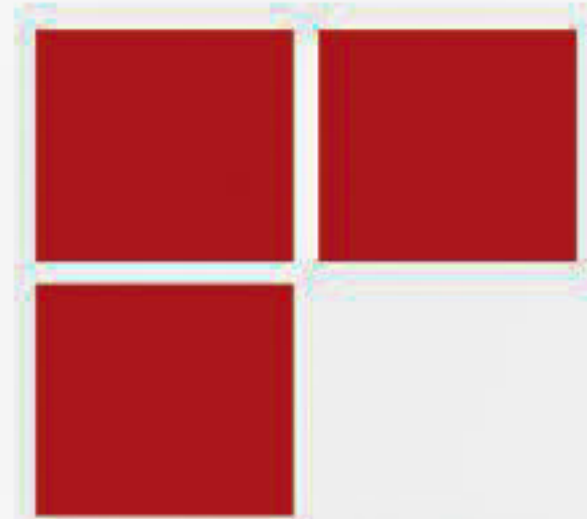
"It's quite hard to start well on that pitch. There is considerable turn. If we can get reverse swing it brings the pacers in the morning. So that's why this break again is good for us. It's very hard to predict what's going to happen tomorrow. One very good knock from a batsman or two very good balls from a bowler. That's why we love Test cricket isn't it?" he added.

While he praised Sabbir Rahman for the latter's fight, he believes that the batsman will be under pressure on the final day.

"There will be a lot of pressure on him tomorrow to get himself back in and take his scoring options and it's up to us as bowlers to try and pressure him by giving no bad balls," said Broad.

"I think Bangladesh should be very proud of the way they performed and we are proud of how we utilised our skills in these conditions. I am not sure if we are the experienced ones considering it's our first Test here in six years. So a lot of credit has to go to both sets of players. There's going to be eleven very

and eleven very delighted guys tomorrow [today] because this



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BD-ENG SCOREBOARD

| ENGLAND: 1st innings 293 | | BANGLADESH: 1st innings 248 | | |
|--|--------|-----------------------------|----|---|
| ENGLAND: 2nd innings | | R/B 4s/6s | | |
| (overnight 228-8) | | | | |
| Cook c Mahmudullah b Mehedi | 12/23 | 1/0 | | |
| Duckett c Mominul b Shakib | 15/34 | 1/0 | | |
| Root lbw b Shakib | 1/4 | 0/0 | | |
| Balance c Imrul b Taijul | 9/25 | 1/0 | | |
| Moeen c Mushfiqur b Shakib | 14/50 | 0/0 | | |
| Stokes lbw b Shakib | 85/151 | 6/3 | | |
| Bairstow b Kamrul | 47/95 | 6/0 | | |
| Woakes not out | 19/47 | 1/0 | | |
| Rashid lbw b Shakib | 9/18 | 2/0 | | |
| Broad run out | 10/27 | 2/0 | | |
| Batty lbw b Taijul | 3/8 | 0/0 | | |
| Extras: (b-3, lb-8, pen-5) 16 | | | | |
| Total: (All out in 80.2 overs) 240 | | | | |
| Fall of wickets: 1-26, 2-27, 3-28, 4-46, 5-62, 6-189, 7-197, 8-213, 9-233, 10-240. | | | | |
| Bowler | O | M | R | W |
| Mehedi | 20 | 1 | 58 | 1 |
| Shakib | 33 | 7 | 85 | 5 |
| Taijul | 15.2 | 2 | 41 | 2 |
| Kamrul | 8 | 0 | 24 | 1 |
| Mahmudullah | 1 | 0 | 6 | 0 |
| Shafiqul | 3 | 0 | 10 | 0 |
| BANGLADESH: 2nd innings | | R/B 4s/6s | | |
| Tamim c Balance b Moeen | 9/33 | 0/0 | | |
| Imrul c Root b Rashid | 43/61 | 6/0 | | |
| Mominul lbw b Batty | 27/47 | 4/0 | | |
| Mahmudullah lbw b Batty | 17/36 | 0/0 | | |
| Shakib c Bairstow b Moeen | 24/39 | 1/1 | | |
| Mushfiqur c Balance b Batty | 39/124 | 3/0 | | |
| Sabbir not out | 59/93 | 3/2 | | |
| Mehedi lbw b Broad | 1/9 | 0/0 | | |
| Kamrul c Balance b Broad | 0/3 | 0/0 | | |
| Taijul not out | 11/23 | 1/0 | | |
| Extras: (b-9, lb-13, w-1) | 23 | | | |
| Total: (For 8 wickets in 78 overs) | 253 | | | |
| To bat: Shafiqul Islam | | | | |
| Fall of wickets: 1-35, 2-81, 3-103, 4-108, 5-140, 6-227, 7-234, 8-238. | | | | |
| Bowler | O | M | R | W |
| Batty | 17 | 3 | 65 | 3 |
| Moeen | 14 | 2 | 60 | 2 |
| Woakes | 7 | 3 | 10 | 0 |
| Rashid | 17 | 2 | 55 | 1 |
| Broad | 13 | 4 | 26 | 2 |



Experienced England pace bowler Stuart Broad (L) revelled under fading light on the fourth day of an absorbing Chittagong Test to tilt the balance towards the visitors.

PHOTO: STAR

'Bravo! This is amazing'

BISHWAJIT ROY

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza might be on a holiday at Cox's Bazar, but with Bangladesh's cricketers putting in one of their best Test performances in Chittagong, he barely managed to move away from his television set.

As expected, the ODI and T20I skipper watched every day of the Test intensely and congratulated Mushfiqur Rahim and co for their fighting performance.

"Bravo! This is amazing," were the first words when asked to describe the ongoing Test between England and

Bangladesh.

"Test cricket is all about habit. It's difficult to perform when you don't play enough. But the way our cricketers kept their concentration levels high in every session was amazing to watch, especially because we are playing our first Test in 15 months," he said, while speaking to The Daily Star over the phone.

"If you notice, most of these players haven't even played four-day cricket because they were busy with ODIs and



MASHRAFE BIN MORTAZA

T20Is. To come from there and do well is not a joke. This shows the character of our cricket and is proof that we are heading forward," he added.

While Mashrafe believes that the hosts have a good chance to win the Test on the final day, the result to him doesn't matter as much.

"We still have a chance to win but honestly speaking it does not matter what result we end up with. To play such good cricket on such a difficult wicket is fantastic. For me, this has

DAY'S MOMENTS

SPORTS REPORTER FROM CHITTAGONG

The heat gets to the refreshments

This Test has been played in stifling heat under bright sunshine, so drinks and hydration were crucial for everyone involved. But yesterday, it seemed that the heat of the battle on the pitch and from the sun above had gotten to the operators of the drinks vehicle. In the 59th over of Bangladesh's innings, the drinks vehicle was being driven out onto the field. It then did an abrupt U-turn as there was still 20 minutes to go for the scheduled drinks break.

Confused Kamrul

Pace bowler Kamrul Islam Rabbi has not had an eventful debut. To be fair, the pitch has not called for much pace bowling. But he was in the pressure cooker yesterday when he walked in at the fall of the seventh wicket. Stuart Broad swung it back in to the right-hander and a thin edge cannoned off the pad to short leg, the umpire's finger went up. He immediately signalled for the review but was probably told in not quite the Queen's English by his cockahoop opponents that Bangladesh had exhausted their quota.

But why blame the debutant? He probably thought that reviewing every decision was just the norm as there were 24 so far in the match.

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PERFORMER OF THE DAY

SABBIR RAHMAN



Labelled a shorter format specialist and his mindset questioned when he was selected for the Test side, debutant Sabbir Rahman put any lingering doubts to rest with an imperious performance on the fourth day of the Chittagong Test against England. The

stylish batsman held his own against England's big guns to score an unbeaten 59 -- smashing three fours and two sixes -- and formed a vital 87-run sixth-wicket partnership with captain Mushfiqur Rahim. After the skipper's departure, Sabbir understandably mellowed a bit, but he will be the key for Bangladesh going into the final day if the hosts are to clinch a first-ever Test win against England.