

SPORT



Taskin Ahmed, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Mahmudullah Riyad and Shuvagata Hom clicked selfies (L) as the Tigers roamed Sydney's sights on their day off yesterday, while Mustafizur Rahman (R) visited the Sydney Harbour Bridge. It will be back to business again today, however, when they take on Sydney Thunder in a practice match at the Spotless Stadium.

PHOTOS: COLLECTED

All eyes on Mustafizur

SPORTS REPORTER



Will Mustafizur Rahman make his comeback to competitive cricket when the Tigers play their second and final practice match in Australia against Sydney Thunder today?

A team source informed that the pace sensation, who was said to be operating at 90 per cent intensity before leaving the country for the preparation camp in Sydney, bowled at full steam in the nets in the last few days of the preparation camp and it may not be unlikely to bowl him for one or two overs.

When contacted, chief selector Minhajul Abedin said that he talked

with the team management over phone but did not discuss anything regarding the team for today's match. However, he said there was almost no chance of seeing Mustafizur bowling in Australia; instead he may play the practice match in Auckland on December 22 if everything goes well. He added that they do not want to take any risks with Mustafizur, who is yet to play his first competitive game since his shoulder operation in August.

It was learnt that Mustafizur had consulted a local doctor on Wednesday, and got the go-ahead.

Shakib Al Hasan and Tamim Iqbal were rested for the rain-interrupted game against Sydney Sixers, which BCB XI won by seven wickets through the Duckworth-Lewis method but they may play the

last game for some practice at the Spotless Stadium before leaving for New Zealand on December 19.

Other than the team meeting, the Tigers enjoyed a rest day yesterday and some only did gym work. The players were in 'feel-good' mode after winning the first match but had hardly given any importance to the outcome as the team has bigger ambitions for the trip. Soumya Sarkar's impressive performance in the first game probably was the most satisfying fact for the team management as the left-handed batsman cum gentle medium pacer started the trip on the back of a prolonged bad patch.

Sydney Thunder has named a 14-player squad to take on BCB XI starting at 7:00pm local time (2:00pm BST) and will be streamed live on

cricket.com.au. There is doubt, because of incessant rainfall, whether the game will get underway at all.

According to Thunder's website, Pat Cummins will be available for selection for the Club for the first time since the 2014-15 Big Bash League after being the leading wicket taker during the Matador Cup. The Australia Test bowler recently took six wickets for Australia in his first three matches back to international cricket. England ODI captain Eoin Morgan is set to play his first game at Spotless Stadium.

SYDNEY THUNDER SQUAD
Fawad, Blizzard, Cummins, Doran, Gibson, Green, Lenton, Patterson, Eoin Morgan, McAndrew, McDermott, McKay, Nair and Sandhu.

500 fine for tardiness!

PTI, Lucknow

These are days of demonetisation and India's hockey players are 'extra cautious' with their hard earned cash with strict disciplinarian Roelant Oltmans imposing a fine of Rs 500 on any player, who is late for their training sessions, get-togethers or official functions.

Discipline and no-nonsense approach have been two key principles in Oltmans' approach and many feel that it has worked wonders for Indian hockey as the team is now ranked 6th in the world.

"Oltmans is a strict disciplinarian on and off the field and he expects the same from the players. Anyone who is late for team meetings, get-togethers, official functions, video sessions or even the team dinner, he fines them Rs 500," a source associated with the Indian team told PTI on the sidelines of the ongoing men's Junior Hockey World Cup here.

"It is his way to make everyone realise that discipline and punctuality are key to success," added the source.

The amount which is collected from fines later spent on food and drinks during team outings. The rule is strictly enforced for the senior team while the juniors have been given some leeway.

Kohli's sights on county cricket

AFP, Chennai

Virat Kohli on Wednesday said he hoped to play county cricket before India's next tour of England and try to improve on his poor showing during the team's last visit.

The captain has hit 640 runs during the first four Tests against England, a far cry from his average of 13.40 when India last visited the country in 2014.

England's James Anderson said India's dry pitches covered up "flaws" in Kohli's technique, prompting an outraged response from spinner Ravichandran Ashwin, who confronted the fast bowler during the fourth Test in Mumbai.

But when asked, ahead of the fifth and final Test in Chennai, if he would like to play county cricket in England, Kohli said: "If I have a chance I would love to do that."

"I would love to be there a month or month-and-a-half beforehand getting used to playing in the conditions, understand what the wickets play like in that phase of the year."

Kohli's series-leading total of runs has led India to an emphatic 3-0 victory over England with one Test still to come, avenging two consecutive series defeats to the visitors.

He said he was trying to work out how to fit in a county stint before India's tour in 2018, while still playing the lucrative April-May Indian Premier League.

"I have actually been thinking about it and try to work out how I can make that happen. Most definitely if I have time I would love to," said Kohli.

Kurtz considers practice plans

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh's German hockey coach Oliver Kurtz is mulling over the idea of taking the national team to South Africa to play a few practice matches as a part of the preparation for the World Hockey League Round-2, which is to be held from March 4 to 12 in Dhaka.

Kurtz, who has already initiated the selection procedure by conducting a training camp with the young players, has proposed a plan, along with his contract, to the Bangladesh Hockey Federation to ensure the team gets prepared abroad.

"We have already started a new selec-

tion with some 40 players and to increase fitness levels, we will conduct a two-week long athletic camp at BKSP in January. After the camp here, players will be prepared in an international camp in which the boys will play three warm-up matches against South Africa," said Kurtz at a press conference at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Previously, the national hockey team travelled to Poland and Austria before last month's AHF Cup to play eight practice matches.

Kurtz also plans to play two to three matches in Dhaka against foreign teams before beginning their World Hockey League Round-2 campaign where Bangladesh aim to reach the semifinal.

The German coach, who guided

Bangladesh to victory in the AHF Cup during November, is expected to sign a contract with the game's governing body until October 2017 in order to coach the team through the Asia Cup.

"Both of us agreed in principle to sign the agreement within a few days. Kurtz wanted to know details of the domestic calendar as he wants to prepare a long-term plan considering those domestic programmes. Besides which we are also examining the legal aspects of the contract," said Bangladesh Hockey Federation general secretary Abdus Sadeque.

Initially Kurtz had signed a three-month contract, which expired on November 30th, to guide the national team in the AHF Cup.

Smith ton puts Oz in control

AFP, Brisbane



Skipper Steve Smith scored a hundred and rookies Matt Renshaw and Peter Handscomb half-centuries as Australia took an early grip on the pink-ball first Test against Pakistan in Brisbane on Thursday.

Smith, dropped on 53, showed the way as the Australians built the foundations for a sturdy first innings after winning the toss.

At the close before a first day Gabba crowd of more than 26,000, the home side were 288 for three with Smith on 110 and Handscomb, playing in only his second Test match, not out on 64.

Smith raised his 16th Test century with a driven four off Mohammad Amir with three overs left in the day. It came off 184 balls with 15 fours.

The pair put on an unbroken stand of 137 runs for the fourth wicket after 20-year-old opener Renshaw chipped in with an impressive 71 also playing in his second Test.

Smith was put down on 53 nearing the dinner break when an edge off spinner Azhar Ali went in and out of wicketkeeper Sarfraz Ahmed's gloves.

Smith and Handscomb batted through the entire final session when most wickets statistically tumble in



Australia skipper Steve Smith scored an unbeaten 110 to put his team in control on the first day of the first Test against Pakistan in Brisbane yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

pink-ball Tests under the lights to put Australia in a strong position.

Pakistan feared they might have lost their star pace bowler Mohammad Amir after he fell to the ground in the final session clutching his right knee after a misfield.

Amir jarred his knee after his right leg dug into the turf as the ball ran on to the boundary rope.

He was ferried off the ground by a medi-cab, but remarkably returned to the field 30 minutes later and went on to finish the session bowl-

ing with the second new ball.

It was a huge relief for the tourists after it conjured up memories of England fast bowler Simon Jones rupturing an anterior cruciate ligament in a similar fielding mishap at the Gabba in 2002.

"His knee went into the ground and we all feared that he might be worse, but thank God he recovered quickly and he came back," teammate Azhar Ali said.

"He's feeling much better and the good thing is that he came on and

bowled with the second new ball, which is a good sign."

Australia lost the wicket of Renshaw in the middle session after the dismissals of David Warner and Usman Khawaja in the opening session.

Renshaw did not put a foot wrong in an assured innings until the 44th over when he was caught behind off Wahab for 71 off 125 balls.

The youngster looked at ease in his home ground Test match and was on course for his maiden Test century before Wahab struck.

"I'm just enjoying it and trying to go out there and play with a smile on my face because it's doing something I love, playing for my country," Renshaw said. "Everyone is disappointed when they get out, but I got 71, it's my best innings in Test cricket and I was excited to get to 71."

It was reward for Wahab, who was Pakistan's best performing bowler.

Pakistan struck with two quick wickets in the first session after openers Warner and Renshaw gave Australia a solid start.

SCORES IN BRIEF:
AUSTRALIA: First innings 288 for 3 (Renshaw 71, Smith 110 not out, Handscomb 64 not out; Amir 1-40, Riaz 1-51)

PAKISTAN: Sami, Azhar, Babar, Yousif, Misbah, Shaheq, Sarfraz, Wahab, Amir, Shah, Ali.

Good start for the new batch

SPORTS REPORTER



Skipper Saif Hassan hit a fine 67 as the Bangladesh Under-19 team recorded a comprehensive four-wicket win against Afghanistan in their opening match of the ACC U-19 Asia Cup at the Uyanwatte Stadium in Matara today.

It was actually the first competitive match for a fresh youth team and Saif's composed innings only speaks of the quality he has got. It was not flashy but matured in the context of the situation. His 129-ball knock contained 10 boundaries. The right-hander shared a vital 74 runs for the fourth wicket with Rayan Rafsan Rahman (32) to take Bangladesh close to victory, chasing a modest 147 to win in 50 overs.

Bangladesh were only five runs away when they lost three wickets including that of Saif, before reaching the target in 43.1 overs.

Earlier, the Bangladesh youths bowled their Afghanistan counterparts out for 146 with left-arm medium pacer Qazi Onik claiming four wickets for 22 runs in his eight overs. Right-arm pacer Mukidul Islam picked up three wickets, giving away 29 runs.

Placed in Pool B, the youths will take on Singapore at the Galle International Stadium today. They will also play their most important group league game against Pakistan, who thrashed Singapore yesterday by nine wickets and have earned one bonus point by racing to their victory target of 80 in just 8.3 overs, at Galle on Sunday.

India are leading the other group that includes Nepal, Malaysia and hosts Sri Lanka. All teams were involved in action on the opening day with India posting a massive 245-run win against Malaysia. Nepal gave hosts Sri Lanka a real scare before losing by the one run in an exciting game at Colombo where the home side posted 227.

SCORES IN BRIEF

AFGHANISTAN: 146 all out in 48.3 overs (Wahdat 32, Naveen 27, Parwiz 23; Mukidul 3-29, Onik 4-22)

BANGLADESH: 150 for 6 in 43.1 overs (Saif 67, Rayan 32; Zahir 2-21, Tariq 1-19)

Result: Bangladesh won by 4 wickets.



Bangladesh U-19 captain Saif Hassan hit a match-winning 67 against Afghanistan in Matara yesterday.

PHOTO: BCS

Cook shrugs off captaincy concerns

Final Eng-Ind Test from today

AFP, Chennai



England's Alastair Cook on Thursday shrugged off criticism of his captaincy ahead of the fifth and final Test against India in Chennai, saying one has to live and die by the decisions made.

The tourists, who lost the series 3-0 after the fourth Test loss in Mumbai, started off with a strong performance in the first drawn Test in Rajkot but could not keep pace with top-ranked India.

Cook's role as a leader has been brought into question after the three consecutive defeats but he insisted that it is all part of the job.

"You get judged on your results as a captain don't you? And when you lose games of cricket you are under fire, it happens to everyone," Cook said.

Cook admitted reading the pitch wrong in the Mohali Test and also regretted using just two spinners in Mumbai.

"When you're part of the leadership group you live and die by those decisions and when it's going well everybody thinks you're brilliant and when you're doing badly everybody thinks you're terrible," he said.

Still, Cook insisted England's effort could not be criticised.

"We've put everything into this tour. I'll have no regrets on the effort and clearly we'd rather not be 3-0 down."

"One thing you can't fault is how hard we've fought and I'm proud of how we've stuck together," Cook told reporters.

Cook, who has said that Joe Root is "ready" for the captain's job, was again asked about his likely successor.

"The moment he got off the plane in India in 2012 you knew he [Root] was ready for international cricket."

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