

# SPORT



Pacer Mustafizur Rahman (L) is confident enough in his fitness to bolster the Tigers' pace bowling department in Sri Lanka while Rubel Hossain has been rewarded with a place in the Test squad following his good performances in the BCL.

PHOTOS: STAR FILE

## Mustafizur, Rubel among five pacers

### Imrul out of first Sri Lanka Test; may return for second

SPORTS REPORTER

Test tours to Sri Lanka have been a bittersweet affair for Bangladesh, admittedly with much more of the bitter stuff than the sweet. Fortunately for Bangladesh, the unpleasant experiences are confined to their early days in Test cricket, in their first decade. Their most recent tour of the island nation in 2013 saw their highest Test score, their first Test double-century essayed by captain Mushfiqur Rahim and consequently a genuine drawn Test in Galle, one of only two non-defeats against Sri Lanka in 16 Tests.

Perhaps coincidentally, Bangladesh's similarly bitter-sweet experience of Test cricket has been trending towards relatively more pleasant experiences recently -- namely competing in all their recent away Tests and before that, winning the Dhaka Test against England last year. And the national selectors have formed a 16-man squad, announced at noon yesterday, with the aim of bringing all the better elements together and trying their best to cover all bases.

Mustafizur Rahman is back in the Test fold after

regaining confidence in his bowling in the aftermath of shoulder surgery and fellow pacer Rubel Hossain, who impressed in the second Test in New Zealand, takes the place of Shaiful Islam who is out with a stomach ailment.

The slight surprise is that there are five pacers -- Taskin Ahmed, Kamrul Islam Rabbi, Subhashis Roy, Mustafizur and Rubel -- in a squad that is going on tour

a turning wicket, so there may well be a seaming track in Galle. We cannot be sure of what their plans are.

"In New Zealand's last Test at Galle, Tim Southee took almost eight wickets [Southee actually took four and Trent Boult took two in the first innings], so we have to keep that in mind."

The other noteworthy aspect of the squad is that opener Imrul Kayes has not made the list because of the thigh muscle tear he sustained in New Zealand in January, which was aggravated during the practice match before the Test in India earlier this month. Promising youngster Mosaddek Hossain, therefore, retains his place in the squad. Minhajul however did not close the door on Imrul returning for the second Test, starting on March 15, if he passes a fitness test on March 4.

"It is unfortunate that he was injured before the Hyderabad Test. We will observe his fitness for two rounds of the Bangladesh Cricket League. The second round will end on March 1, and after two days' rest he will go for a fitness Test. If he does well there we will include him in the squad for the second Test," said Minhajul, adding that including Imrul would not be a problem because he is also part of the plan for the limited-overs leg of the tour that will follow the Tests.

#### TEST SQUAD

Tamim Iqbal, Liton Kumar Das, Soumya Sarkar, Mominul Haque, Mahmudullah Riyad, Shakib Al Hasan, Mushfiqur Rahim (C), Sabbir Rahman, Mehedi Hasan Miraz, Mustafizur Rahman, Taijul Islam, Taskin Ahmed, Mosaddek Hossain, Kamrul Islam Rabbi, Subashis Roy and Rubel Hossain.

to a subcontinent nation.

"In Galle [the venue for the first Test starting from March 7] the wicket may have some grass," chief selector Minhajul Abedin told reporters at Mirpur yesterday. "If they provide a sporting track maybe we have to play with three seamers. We know the P Sara Oval [venue for the second Test] will be

## South, Central in command

SPORTS REPORTER



Walton Central Zone and Prime Bank South Zone finished the third day of the fourth round of the Bangladesh Cricket League in strong positions.

At the Khan Shaheb Osman Ali Stadium in Fatullah, BCB North Zone are following-on on a good batting surface after the brilliant double hundred that South Zone's Tushar Imran had scored earlier in the game.

While Tushar was the hero with the bat, it was Nahidul Islam who was their chief wicket-taker. North Zone were bundled out for 242 in 62.2 overs in their first innings with Nahidul finishing with figures of 5 for 104. South Zone skipper Abdur Razzak did a decent job as well, taking three scalps and ending with 3 for 74. The remaining wickets were taken by pacer Al-Amin Hossain, who finished with 2 for 23.

Dhiman Ghosh and Farhad Hossain were the key run-scorers for North Zone. While

Dhiman scored 67, Farhad posted 56. Unfortunately for North Zone, neither of the batsmen managed to turn their scores into a big knock. They were both dismissed by Razzak before they could do any lasting damage.

The Northerners were asked to follow on and finished on 154 for 2 at the end of the day. Nahidul took the crucial wicket of opener Junaid Siddique, who was looking good on 46. It will be a tough ask for North Zone to survive the final day tomorrow, but if that is to happen they will



NAHIDUL ... 5 for 104

need their star players, the likes of Nasir Hossain and Naeem Islam, to perform.

In the day's other game at the BKSP, East Zone were dismissed for 211 in reply to Central Zone's first innings total of 328. The pressure

further mounted on East Zone with Central hammering 266 runs at a run-rate of close to 4.

Central ended the day with a lead of 383 and it is a surprise that they have not declared yet. However, there is a good chance that they will do so today and go for a win.

#### SCORES IN BRIEF

##### CENTRAL ZONE V EAST ZONE

CENTRAL ZONE: 328 and 266 for 5 (Marshall 73, Taibur 55 not out; Mominul 2-40, Abul 1-29)

EAST ZONE: 211 all out in 67.1 overs (Yasir 48 not out, Abul 48; Sharif 4-59, Mosharrar 2-33, Shuvagata 2-51)

##### SOUTH ZONE V NORTH ZONE

SOUTH ZONE: 501

NORTH ZONE: 242 all out in 62.2 overs (Dhiman 67, Farhad 56; Nahidul 5-104, Razzak 3-74, Al-Amin 2-23) and 154 for 2 (Farhad 62, Junaid 46; Mosaddek 1-32, Nahidul 1-42)

## Arman to play final game today

SPORTS REPORTER from Chittagong

Former national midfielder Arman Aziz is all set to declare his retirement from international and domestic football after playing for Chittagong Abahani against Mohammedan SC in their Sheikh Kamal International Club Cup match at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong today.

Although he was earmarked as a replacement for stellar midfielders such as Arman Mia, Motiur Munna and Iqbal Hossain, Arman failed to shine for the national team at the international level due to various injuries. However, he remained a crucial cog whenever he represented Mohammedan SC, Abahani, Muktiyodha Sangsad and his last club, Chittagong Abahani.

He spent his peak at Mohammedan SC from 2005-2010, barring the 2006 season, as he guided the Black and Whites to four trophies in his two years as captain. He was also picked for the national team in his first season

at Mohammedan. Arman also captained the Bangladesh U-23 team in the Qatar Asian Games and represented the national team from 2005-2010 in the SAAF Championship.

"It is a happy moment for me because I am getting the opportunity to call time on my career at a venue from where I grew up," said the Chittagong native who resides in Rangunia and debuted in the Chittagong Premier League for Bakulia Eleven before joining Youngmen's Club Fakirerpool in Dhaka.

"Football gave me a lot and took me to this stage. Now I want to give back to the game by keeping myself involved with the Chittagong Abahani management as football chairman Tarafder Ruhul Amin wants me to stay with him to implement some footballing programmes," said Arman.



Chittagong Abahani coach Safiul Bari Titu emphasised on the need for fitness during his side's match against Dhaka Mohammedan today. His players are pictured doing running drills during training at the Chittagong Physical Education College ground yesterday.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

## Hosts gunning for semis

### Ctg Abahani face Mohammedan today

ANISUR RAHMAN from Chittagong

Buoyed by a 3-0 win over Shaheen Asmayee FC, holders Chittagong Abahani will be looking forward to confirming a semifinal berth in the Sheikh Kamal International Club Cup with an outright win over Dhaka Mohammedan SC at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong today.

Chittagong Abahani's players looked cheerful at the Halishahor residential camp yesterday after getting off to a winning start against the Afghani outfit as well as getting a winning bonus from the team management. However, they will need to keep their feet on the ground as today's battle will be against players who are well-versed with the weaknesses and strengths of each of the hosts' players.

While Chittagong Abahani are tipped as favourites considering both teams' performance in their respective matches, it is expected to be a good game as the Black and Whites will be looking to keep their hopes alive with a win.

"We will go there keeping the semifinal berth in mind. There is no reason to consider them a weaker side," said Chittagong Abahani coach Saiful Bari Titu. "It is always challenging to play against known players and it is the players' responsibility to how to deal with the opponents as all of them know each other. However, fitness will matter in the match."

The fitness levels of the Chittagong Abahani players are definitely much better than their Mohammedan counterparts, who looked too tired to move against Nepal's Manang Marshyangdi

Club and conceded two goals due to the seemingly unfit backlines

On-song striking pair -- Augustin Walson and Kingsley Chigozi -- will provide a big advantage to Chittagong Abahani, who handed a 4-2 and 1-0 defeats to Mohammedan in the Bangladesh Premier League last season and Titu will definitely rely on Walson and Kingsley -- who shared three goals against Shaheen Asmayee -- during the game. Winger Zahid Hossain, a key architect behind Chittagong Abahani's triumph in the last edition, will likely be back to bolster the squad and may take the place of Mannaf Rabbi.

"Of course, we will rely on them [Walson and Kingsley] again because they have a good understanding and they lifted Brothers Union in the domestic league. They also know that and told me that they want to do better for Chittagong Abahani," said the former national coach.

On the other hand Mohammedan SC, despite suffering a 2-0 defeat to Manang Marshyangdi Club, are also aiming to stay alive in the race by putting up an attacking brand of football against Chittagong Abahani.

"You know we have come here with little preparation, but at the moment we don't have any room to look back. We want to capitalize on this opportunity against Chittagong Abahani, who are tough opponents. We don't want to lose all three points. If we get one point, then we will have a chance in the last match and we don't want to give that away," said Mohammedan coach Abdul Kaiyum Sentu.

In the day's other match, Shaheen Asmayee FC will take on Nepal's Manang Marshyangdi Club.

## 'Saintfiet was a mistake'

SPORTS REPORTER from Chittagong



After the Bangladesh national football team's failure in Asian Cup Qualification following a disastrous 3-1 aggregate defeat to lightweights Bhutan, the national players came under fire for their substandard performances. Then again, Belgian coach Tom Saintfiet hardly had any answers when queried about his strategy.

Saintfiet also dropped Bangladesh's lone expatriate footballer, Jamal Bhuiyan, saying that he was an overweight footballer who could not run as much as required, despite the Denmark-born holding midfielder drawing praise from all quarters since his debut against Nepal in the 2012 SAAF Championship.

The 26-year-old midfielder, who is currently playing for Chittagong Abahani in the Sheikh Kamal International Club Cup, spoke about the national team's failure against Bhutan yesterday.

"Tom Saintfiet was a big reason [behind Bangladesh's failure against Bhutan] because after he was sacked by the national team, he went to Trinidad and Tobago and he was there only 26 days [before resigning]. I think Tom Saintfiet was a big mistake. That is my opinion," said Jamal.

"The way he wanted to play, the Bangladesh players were not ready for that. If we don't have the players for that, then why would I play like that?"

However, Jamal believes that Bangladesh can beat Bhutan like they did in the SAAF Championship [3-1 win in 2015], saying it was all about getting the tactics right and selecting the right team.

"I think they [the Bangladesh Football Federation] should consider the CV [of a new coach] by seeing what he did in past and how he coaches; whether he is good for Bangladesh or not. I am sorry to say that Tom Saintfiet was a big mistake and they should not repeat it," said Jamal, suggesting that the BFF should appoint a Bangladeshi as the assistant coach if another foreign coach is appointed in the future.

"Local coaches understand local players and foreign coaches bring something new to

the table and it is a very hard choice. I feel the assistant coach must definitely be a Bangladeshi because they understand how the players feel," said Jamal.

Jamal is looking forward to playing for the national team again if he is called up for next month's Bangabandhu Gold Cup and he is also keen on extending his domestic career in Bangladesh for the third successive season.

"If they call me, of course I will go back to the national team. I hope they call me and I can play Bangabandhu Gold Cup," said Jamal. "I also want to settle my salary [Tk 5 lakh] with Sheikh Russel KC, before accepting any offers from others here. I have rejected offers from Bahamian and Indonesian clubs because I want to play here and make my name here."



JAMAL BHUIYAN



Bangladesh Test captain Mushfiqur Rahim is seen paying his respects to the martyrs of the language movement as the country celebrated International Mother Language Day yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED