

# SPORT



After Tuesday's rain ruined outdoor practice opportunities for Bangladesh, off-spinner Mehedi Hasan Miraz and the rest of his teammates enjoyed their first full day of practice on the tour of Sri Lanka at the R Premadasa Stadium in Colombo yesterday ahead of their warm-up match today.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

## Mushfiqur to give up keeping?

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh skipper Mushfiqur Rahim may not don the wicket-keeping gloves during the two-match Test series against Sri Lanka. The decision was reportedly taken during a team meeting on Tuesday.

"Mushfiqur may not keep in the Tests against Sri Lanka. He may bat up the order as well. We spoke to him during a team meeting yesterday and he took the decision quite positively. We spoke to him and we gave him examples of other batsmen, like Kumar Sangakkara, who did extremely well in Test cricket after quitting keeping," team manager Khaled Mahmud told The Daily Star yesterday.

"He is our best batsman and we want him to bat up the order. He understands that this decision is for the sake of the team and he took it sportingly," he added.

While Mushfiqur's keeping in the ODIs did not seem to concern the team management in the recent past, his role behind the stumps has repeatedly received attention in the longer version. There have been a number of times when he missed easy opportunities and the missed stumping in the last Test against India raised calls for a specialist wicketkeeper.

He is also technically Bangladesh's best batsman in the longer version and as such the team management wants him to focus completely on his batting. Against New Zealand, he injured his thumb while scoring a brilliant century in the first innings. However, he could not keep in the rest of the series because of the injury and Bangladesh were forced to employ the likes of Imrul Kayes and Sabbir Rahman -- neither of whom keep in domestic cricket -- to take the gloves.

Imrul took over Mushfiqur's gloves and kept for most of the game. However, he got injured in the second innings and in a recent interview admitted that the long keeping stint could have been a reason.

Prior to Bangladesh's departure to Sri Lanka, Mushfiqur and the national selectors were repeatedly asked if there would be a new keeper in the Bangladesh team for the Sri Lanka series. Mushfiqur had said that he would want to continue keeping provided that the team management supports him.

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) chief selector Minhajul Abedin and BCB cricket operations chairman Akram Khan, on the other hand, said that the decision with regards to Mushfiqur's keeping rested completely upon the captain himself.

"Whether we choose a new keeper or not depends on Mushfiqur. If he feels that he is capable to keep behind the stumps, we won't even explore the matter," Akram had said.

However, it seems as though the team management in Sri Lanka, including head coach Chandika Hathurusingha and Khaled Mahmud, have decided to travel a different path.

The question that remains is who will Liton Das the only other keeper in the squad, replace? If Mushfiqur plays up the order, then he is likely to take up Mahmudullah Riyad's position at four. Will Riyad be dropped? Or will he go back to his former position and play lower down the order. If not, then Sabbir Rahman might be sacrificed. Either way, Bangladesh will have to take the tough decision of tinkering with their settled batting order.

At the moment, the axe seems likely to fall on Riyad, who has not been in good form in the longer version recently.

"We will decide who Liton will replace after the practice match. We still have time for that," said Mahmud, when asked about the upcoming batting combination.

Going by Mahmud's statement, one could presume that Mushfiqur may not keep in today's practice match against Sri Lanka Cricket Board XI either. 12 out of the 16 players will be playing in the warm-up.

There is a high chance that Bangladesh's senior players, the likes of Shakib Al Hasan and Mushfiqur Rahim may not feature in the warm-up game.

While Bangladesh could not train on Tuesday due to inclement weather, they had a good outing yesterday.



"We had a full day's training. It was solid. The players were up to their respective tasks. They all performed their disciplines properly. The weather here is a bit cloudy, but otherwise it's fine," said Mahmud.

After the warm-up game at Moratuwa, the first Test will begin at the Galle International Cricket Stadium on March 7. The second Test, which will be Bangladesh's 100th, will begin on March 15 at the P. Sara Oval.

## Big win extends North's lead

SPORTS REPORTER



It took 12 overs for BCB North Zone to capture Walton Central Zone's remaining two wickets on the fourth and final morning

to win the fifth-round match of the Bangladesh Cricket League by an innings and 85 runs at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday.

The win helped North Zone extend their lead at the top of the four-team table with 19 points while Prime Bank South Zone managed a draw in the other match at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong to follow them with 13 points.

Resuming the day on 229 for eight, Central Zone were bundled out for 271 as Sunzamul Islam first took a return catch to send overnight batsman Tanbir Hayder back to the pavilion and then the left-arm spinner trapped Shahadat Hossain in front for six runs. Tanbir scored 51 off 97 balls.

Mohammad Sharif, who started the day on 19, was the not out batsman with 45 off 82 deliveries.

At Chittagong, South Zone denied Islami Bank East Zone to secure full points thanks to the patience of their batsmen. Resuming the day on 29 without loss, South Zone batted it out for a draw as they scored 198 for five. Opener Fazle Mahmud occupied the

crease for nearly four hours to score 36 runs from 168 balls.

Shahriar Nafees scored 36 and Mohammad Mithun made 29 but both batsmen spent nearly two hours at the crease.

When Tushar Imran went to bat he required 27 runs to cross the 1000-run mark in the season and the right-hander achieved the milestone but ultimately was dismissed for 31 runs.

With the draw, East Zone improved their tally to 12 points while Central Zone has 9 points.

The sixth-round matches will start from March 5 in BKSP and Fatullah.

### POINTS TABLE

Teams	Mat	W	L	D	Pts
North Zone	5	2	0	3	19
South Zone	5	1	0	4	13
East Zone	5	1	2	2	12
Central Zone	5	1	3	1	9

### SCORES IN BRIEF

#### CENTRAL ZONE V NORTH ZONE

**CENTRAL ZONE:** 181 and 271 all out in 76 overs (Saif 70, Mazid 43, Tanbir 51, Sharif 45 not out; Babu 4-67, Sunzamul 3-114)

**NORTH ZONE:** 537.

**Result:** North Zone won by an innings and 85 runs.

#### SOUTH ZONE V EAST ZONE

**SOUTH ZONE:** 296 and 198-5 in 96 overs (Anamul 35, Fazle 36, Tushar 31, Nafees 36, Mithun 29 not out; Nayeem 2-48)

**EAST ZONE:** 523

**Result:** Match Drawn

## Lahore delegates part of ICC group: BCB

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh will send a couple of security experts to Pakistan but they will be part of a long list of International Cricket Council (ICC) delegates invited to watch the Pakistan Super League (PSL) final. The much-talked-about PSL final will take place in Lahore on March 5, defying security threats.

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) is considering the PSL final as the first step to convincing other Test playing nations including Bangladesh to tour their country that has not staged a single home series or any ICC-sponsored event since a deadly militant attack on the Sri Lankan team bus in Lahore March 2009. Only Zimbabwe made a brief visit in May 2015.

The PTI on Wednesday reported that the PCB is trying to convince the Bangladesh

Cricket Board to send its national team in Pakistan to play a full Test series in December and that the PCB had suggested to the BCB to send a team of security and vigilance experts for the PSL final so that they can update their superiors about whether it was safe to send the Bangladesh team to Pakistan.

However, when contacted, BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury said that the PCB request was to all members of the ICC.

"We are sending one or two experts as part of the ICC delegates. And the whole trip will be funded by the game's governing body. This is something that was decided in the last ICC meeting and other board members will also be sending their representatives," Nizamuddin told The Daily Star over phone.

According to the FTP (Future Tours Programme) Pakistan are scheduled to play a full series in Bangladesh next December.

## Pune pitch not poor: Vijay

AFP, New Delhi

Batsman Murali Vijay on Wednesday rejected the idea that the Pune pitch was to blame for India's drubbing in the first Test against Australia despite it being classified as "poor" by the match referee.

Virat Kohli's team crumbled twice for totals of 105 and 107 in the two innings at Pune's Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium, going down to less fancied Australia by 333 runs.

The nature of the Pune track, which turned sharply from day one, prompted the International Cricket Council (ICC) match referee Chris Broad to express concern over the quality of the pitch.

But speaking ahead of the second Test which begins in Bangalore on Saturday, Vijay resisted the temptation to blame the pitch for India's meek showing in Pune which brought an end to a 19-match unbeaten run.

"I don't say the Pune wicket was a poor wicket. It was a challenging wicket from ball one," the Indian opening batsman told reporters.

"As cricketers we need to play on such wickets to test your ability rather than playing on flat tracks," said Vijay.

Vijay, like many others, expected a sporting track at Bangalore's M Chinnaswamy Stadium but insisted that he is not too bothered about the character of the wicket.



India captain Virat Kohli takes a catch during a practice session at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bangalore yesterday. India will take on Australia in the second Test on March 4.

PHOTO: AFP

## Guptill masterclass levels series

AFP, Hamilton



Martin Guptill roared back from injury with a record-breaking 180 as New Zealand thrashed South Africa by seven wickets to level the one-day international series in Hamilton on Wednesday.

Guptill's score was the highest by a New Zealander in an ODI chase and allowed the Black Caps to overhaul the 280 target set by South Africa with five overs to spare.

The result avenges the New Zealanders' 159-run loss in the previous match and levels the five-match series 2-2, setting up a decider in Auckland on Saturday.

It was a stunning return for Guptill, who showed no ill effects from being sidelined for five weeks with hamstring problems.

He posted the highest-ever ODI score by a New Zealander against the Proteas and his 180-run partnership with Ross Taylor (66) was also a new benchmark against South Africa.

"It was one of those innings where everything went to plan," Guptill said. "But I've got to park it pretty quickly because we've got another game in Eden Park in a few days."

Hitting the ball crisply from the outset, Guptill debunked expectations that the Seddon Park pitch would become a spinners' paradise as the match wore on.

The opposite proved true, with Black Cap spinner Jeetan Patel enjoying early success before batsmen from both sides showed runs were there for the taking on an increasingly docile deck.

It meant South Africa's total of 279 for eight -- made after winning the toss and opting to bat -- was not as challenging as it initially appeared. Captain AB de Villiers top-scored for the Proteas with an unbeaten 72, while Faf du Plessis made 67, Hashim Amla 40 and Wayne Parnell 29 off 12 balls. With South Africa looking shaky at 158



Martin Guptill's New Zealand-record 180 helps them chase down South Africa's 279 on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

for six, de Villiers worked with Chris Morris (28) and Parnell to give them a defensible total.

De Villiers said it should have been enough. He refused to use Guptill's outstanding form as an excuse for his side, blaming their failure to take wickets.

"It was a fantastic knock by Martin, he looked unstoppable tonight, but there are areas where we need to improve and we'll be working on that," he said.

### SCORES IN BRIEF

**SOUTH AFRICA:** 279 for 8 in 50 overs (Amla 40, Du Plessis 67, Duminy 25, De Villiers 72 not out, Morris 28, Parnell 29; Patel 2-57)

**NEW ZEALAND:** 280 for 3 in 45 overs (Guptill 180 not out, Taylor 66; Tahir 2-56)

**Result:** New Zealand won by seven wickets and level five-match series 2-2. **Player-of-the-match:** Martin Guptill.

## WI fighting for WC place

AFP, St. John's

West Indies face England in a three-match one-day series starting Friday under pressure to reverse a run of poor form that could see them facing the indignity of having to qualify for the next World Cup in 2019.

The top eight teams in the International Cricket Council ODI rankings at the end of September 2017 automatically advance to the event in England. The West Indies -- struggling in ninth spot three points behind Pakistan and a further two adrift of Bangladesh -- have only this series, a return duel in England in September and, critically, three matches against Pakistan in the Caribbean in April to make the cut.

England have no such concerns as hosts of both the World Cup and the next Champions Trophy in June, for which the West Indies failed to qualify.

West Indies' last victory in a head-to-head series was in 2007 in England under the leadership of Chris Gayle, one of several prominent players now ruled ineligible for regional representative duty due to commitments to lucrative T20 franchise tournaments around the world.

Both teams are coming off series losses, the West Indies failing to advance to the final of a three-nation tournament in Zimbabwe last November that also involved Sri Lanka, and England falling to India in January after being thrashed in the preceding Test series at the end of 2016.