

# SPORT



Bangladesh batsman Sabbir Rahman's run-out shifted the momentum back to Sri Lanka in the first T20I at the R Premadasa Stadium in Colombo yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

BD-SL SCOREBOARD				
<b>BANGLADESH</b>				
Tamim b Malinga		R/B	4s/6s	
Soumya c Perera b Sanjaya	29/20		3/1	
Sabbir run out (Prasanna)	16/14		2/0	
Mushfiq b Gunaratne	8/9		1/0	
Shakib c Gunaratne				
b Prasanna	11/15		0/0	
Mosaddek not out	34/30		3/0	
Mahmudullah b Malinga	31/26		3/0	
Mashrafe not out	9/5		1/0	
Extras: (lb-6, w-10, nb-1)			17	
Total: (For 6 wks in 20 overs)			155	
Did not bat: Saifuddin, Mustafizur, Taskin.				
Fall of wickets: 1-0, 2-57, 3-57, 4-70, 5-82, 6-139.				
<b>Bowler</b>				
Malinga	4	0	38	2
Kulasekara	4	0	44	0
Sanjaya	4	1	24	1
Gunaratne	4	0	24	1
Prasanna	4	0	19	1
<b>SRI LANKA</b>				
K Perera c Soumya b Taskin	77/53		9/1	
Tharanga c Mustafizur				
b Mashrafe	24/23		4/0	
Munaweera c b Mashrafe	8/6		1/0	
Gunaratne run out (Sabbir)	17/18		1/0	
Prasanna not out	22/12		1/2	
T Perera not out	4/1		1/0	
Extras: (lb-4, w-2)			6	
Total: (For 4 wks in 18.5 overs)			158	
Did not bat: Kapugedera, Sirwardana, Kulasekara, Malinga, Sanjaya.				
Fall of wickets: 1-65, 2-79, 3-120, 4-147.				
<b>Bowler</b>				
Mahmudullah	2	0	6	0
Taskin	2.5	0	33	1
Mashrafe	4	0	32	2
Mustafizur	3	0	24	0
Shakib	3	0	29	0
Saifuddin	3	0	23	0
Mosaddek	1	0	7	0
Result: Sri Lanka won by 6 wickets.				
Player-of-the-match: Kusal Perera.				

## Tigers to miss their T20 leader

SPORTS REPORTER from Colombo

The first T20I against Sri Lanka yesterday was overshadowed by Bangladesh skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's announcement at the toss that the two-match series will be his last as player and captain in the shortest format of the game. The announcement was made without much fanfare with the inspirational limited-over captain simply saying at the toss that this will be his last two T20Is. He will however continue to lead Bangladesh in the ODI format.

The national anthems followed, and there was an emotional moment when the big screens showed Mashrafe's face singing along with Bangladesh's national anthem for the last time as a T20 cricketer. As captain, he is the most successful in the format not just in quantity of wins but also in quality. Bangladesh have only beaten Test playing nations other than Zimbabwe five times in the format, and three of those wins came under Mashrafe's leadership.

His win/loss record in T20Is, nine won and 16 lost, is well clear of Bangladesh's overall record of 20 won and 43 lost. His bowling in the format, however, did not match the high standards he has set in ODI cricket. He has conceded runs at

## 'Bangladesh is bigger than Mashrafe'

SAKEB SUBHAN from Colombo

Most other players would have thought that speaking on their retirement once in the day was enough. It is a retirement after all, and regardless of whether the player likes the format he is calling time from, it is an emotional period during which he might want to have his own space.

But Mashrafe Bin Mortaza is not most players. He has made a career and a life out of facing challenges head on and never shying away from responsibility. He never much liked the T20 format which is reflected in his record, but he played it because that is what the team needed; for him to captain a growing team, and that was a responsibility he would not avoid.

Since he had announced the decision at the toss for the first T20I between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, he would have known that it was a very short announcement for a moment of this magnitude, the retirement of inarguably Bangladesh's most beloved cricketer.

That he is not like others could be seen as he hobbled from the post-match presentation across the grass of the R Premadasa International Stadium towards the media conference room on knees that underwent six operations. Mashrafe greeted the press men who flocked to him warmly and with a typical joke that belied the turmoil that must have been raging within.

"I took the decision at 2:00am this morning and let my family know at 2:00pm this

afternoon," Mashrafe said on his way to the press conference. But the pain seemed to be greater that the match was lost, as he bemoaned the middle-order batting collapse and Taskin Ahmed dropping Perera at a crucial time.

His first utterance further cemented his reputation as an ultimate team man, something which he has shown time and again in word and deed.

"The decision I took is because if you look at our fast bowlers like Rubel Hossain, he is not in the side. But he took seven wickets in the last two T20 matches. It hurts me to see that he is not playing.

"When you are playing for Bangladesh, what-

feel welcome after the batsman was dropped from the Test side and earlier, the emotion he displayed when Taskin was banned for a suspect action a year ago, bear witness to that fact. For perhaps the most unselfish cricketer to don the Bangladesh jersey, it was time to let him have his say.

"Yes, it was a sudden decision. It involved a lot of discussions but let's not get into that now. I played five World Cups but I never ending it [T20s]. Maybe because of my injuries; this format is quick and sharp so you don't get enough chances to warm up your body, especially my legs which hurt a lot. I kept going because cricket board was respecting me as a captain. I was trying really hard to build this team. It was a real pleasure to captain in T20s."

He would not entertain questions on whether there was any pressure on him to retire from the powers that be. "Look, Bangladesh are playing good cricket; we are improving bit by bit in all formats. I think at this time let's not create controversies."

The good news for Bangladesh is that there will still be a Mashrafe in the red and green, albeit in one format only after the second T20I on Thursday.

"I am not thinking about [quitting ODIs] at this moment. I don't plan many things, but this was a tough decision. It was the same -- taking it today or two days later."

When asked the inevitable question about whether losing yesterday was the start of a bad ending for him, Mashrafe said: "When I decided last night, I knew that people would say that my ending is good if I win, or my ending is bad if I lose. But I am still playing for Bangladesh, so if I win, Bangladesh wins. Bangladesh is bigger than Mashrafe."

ever the format, and you decide to put away your jersey, it is always a difficult decision. But when I look back, I see Rubel is not in the T20 squad, but I believe he should have been in the first 11. Maybe if I wasn't captain he could have played today. As his performance is better than mine, I think he should play."

If there was some anger behind the decision to exclude Rubel, it did not show and neither was it the time to pull at that thread. But there can be no doubting the genuineness of that sentiment; Mashrafe is and has always been a player's captain - the pains he took to make Mahmudullah Riyad

eight runs an over and taken 39 wickets from 52 matches.

His value, however, was in the inspiration he provided as a leader, which was on view in last year's Asia Cup T20 where Bangladesh contested the final, undoubtedly their best performance in the format.

His retirement from the format seems to be a last controversial punctuation on the tour of Sri Lanka which has seen some ripples behind the scene. There have been murmurs -- unsubstantiated in any public utterance other than BCB president Nazmul Hassan saying that if he had not come to Sri Lanka for Bangladesh's 100th Test some more changes may have taken place -- that there was a plan within the management to take a new route in terms of personnel in the T20I format.

Bangladesh team manager Khaled Mahmud, the day after Bangladesh lost the third ODI, said that T20s were the only avenue for experimentation as the teams in the two other formats were pretty settled. Mashrafe also seemed to hint at that in his message on Facebook.

The question, however, remains about the necessity to make the announcement in the manner that it was made -- out of the blue minutes before play started, which is uncharacteristic in that it made the match all about the decision to retire. Whether it was to get the decision out of the way and focus on the cricket, will be known over the next few days.

## Ties with Root will be fine: Cook

REUTERS, London

Alastair Cook is confident his relationship with newly appointed Test captain Joe Root will be "absolutely fine" and the former England skipper has assured his successor he will get all the support he needs in the role.

Cook, who was appointed captain in 2012, led England in a record 59 Tests including Ashes victories at home in 2013 and 2015 as well as series wins in India and South Africa.

The 32-year-old stepped down in February after a 4-0 defeat in the five-Test series in India at the end of last year. He was replaced by Root, who will captain England for the first time against South Africa at Lord's on July 6.

"A lot will be made of it, there always is, it's a good story to write about but I think it'll be absolutely fine in terms of our relationship," Cook told British media.

The former captain said he hoped his transition back to just playing for the team would be smooth.

"I feel like I can get back in the troops and get on with it and hopefully score some runs and help England win cricket games, which ultimately is what everyone wants to see," he added.



MASHRAFE BIN MORTAZA

**PERFORMER OF THE DAY**

**KUSAL PERERA**

On his first appearance for the national side since December 2016, opener Kusal Perera scored nearly half of Sri Lanka's runs as they chased down Bangladesh' total of 155 with consummate professionalism yesterday. Perera played patiently for the first eight balls and finally hit Shakib Al Hasan for a six, before unleashing five fours off the next seven balls he faced. He reached his half-century off just 31 balls and, together with Upul Tharanga, the left-hander shared a 65-run stand off the first seven overs, calming any nerves at the R Premadasa Stadium. Perera had a reprieve in the 16th over, and added 13 more runs before finally falling in the penultimate over, at which point Sri Lanka needed just nine more runs to win.

## Cash-rich IPL kicks off today

Hyderabad take on Bangalore in opener

AFP, New Delhi

Rajeev Shukla told AFP.

Its appeal has outlasted numerous controversies -- most notably corruption and match-fixing charges -- that at times have raised more eyebrows than the showy theatrics on the pitch.

Shukla acknowledged the league's muddy past but said all possible checks and balances were in place to ensure the 10th edition was a success.

"There may have been some aberrations but the strongest possible action was taken. We have ensured that corruption does not creep in," he said.

A host of international stars have become household names in India, shaping their careers on the IPL stage or resurrecting former glories.

Royal Challengers Bangalore captain and run-machine Virat Kohli will be absent for the opening week of the competition, big hitters abound such as Kohli's teammate Chris Gayle and Sunrisers' David Warner.

The tournament ends on May 21 with the final in Hyderabad.

## 'It's not easy to replace Mash'

SPORTS REPORTER

Once Mashrafe Bin Mortaza announced at the toss of the first T20I that the series against Sri Lanka would be his last in the shortest format of the game, certain questions arose. Was it the right decision at the right time? Did he take the decision willingly? Was he making the sacrifice to prolong his one-day career?

"It was expected, but I was bit surprised with the timing of the announcement. He is the captain of the team and he has two matches in hand; the focus should absolutely have been on the series. He could make the announcement after the finish of the second match. It seemed an emotional decision rather than a mature one, but I don't know whether there was any reason for him to announce it in hurry," said former Bangladesh skipper Gazi Ashraf Hossain.

"I would not say the time has not come for him because he was under pressure with his pace and you know in this format a player needs more than a hundred per cent fitness. It was not a perfect farewell for a player like Mashrafe who has an immense contribution to our cricket. I was a bit surprised when the team management picked up four pacers, bringing in Saifuddin," he added.

For former national skipper turned selector Habibul Bashar it was sad news.

"I must say it's sad news because it's not so easy to replace a cricketer, a leader like Mashrafe. There was

no question about his performance and he always gave his hundred per cent. Definitely the team will miss his service. There is a saying that it's always good to take the decision yourself before people ask for you to take the decision and Mashrafe might be thinking along those lines."

Chief selector Minhajul Abedin however considered it the right decision.

"It's his personal decision but I must say he took the right decision. As a former player I know it is always good to call it a day when you are in good form. As a legend of our cricket I think he took the right decision at the right time. The team will definitely miss him because you cannot compare him with anybody."

Another former captain, Mohammad Ashraful, also believed that his former teammate took the right decision at the right time, and he also believed that it would help Mashrafe prolong his ODI career.

"It is the right decision. What I know is that Mashrafe was also not enjoying T20 cricket. We must understand that under his captaincy Bangladesh started to learn the craft of T20 cricket. The main problem is T20 cricket demands more than a hundred per cent fitness but we all know the great struggle of Mashrafe with his fitness," opined Ashraful.

"One thing we must ensure is that Mashrafe will lead the team in the 2019 World Cup in England. I personally believe his decision of quitting T20 cricket will help him prolong his ODI career, and Bangladesh cricket needs his service in ODI cricket for as long as possible," he added.