

SPORT



Taskin Ahmed (L) shares a light moment with fellow pacer Saifuddin outside the BCB Indoor Facility in Mirpur yesterday. Saifuddin is one of few fringe players training with the Tigers as part of coach Chandika Hathusingha's plan for a bigger national pool. PHOTO: STAR

'I want my last match to be at home'

He has been the longest serving cricketer in the history of Bangladesh cricket and also its most successful ODI captain. Mashrafe Bin Mortaza has taken Bangladesh cricket to new heights with his charisma, inspirational leadership and his performances as a fast bowler. In an exclusive interview with *The Daily Star's* Mazhar Uddin, the 33-year-old speaks about various issues including the philosophy behind his success, the importance of family life and the looming close to a storied international career. The following are excerpts from the conversation.

The Daily Star (TDS): How does Mashrafe view himself after playing for Bangladesh for 17 years?
Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (MBM): I don't know if anyone will believe it or not but I am exactly the same as my character was 17 years ago. I did not wish to change myself and honestly, I can't. When I first came to play cricket I didn't know anyone, did not understand anything and I met people with an open heart -- I am exactly the same now. I could never see myself differently just because I am a cricketer.
TDS: What is needed to become a successful captain? What have you done to become successful?
MBM: First of all I never thought of becoming the captain of Bangladesh and I will

Rahman Durjoy bhai was my captain till [Mehedi Hasan] Miraz I am able to gel with players open-heartedly, which is what I think is special for me.
TDS: How important is family for a player?
MBM: That's the most important thing as you have to stay with your family. At times even your friend may not understand what you are going through, maybe the closest of them might understand. But I think it's family which understands you the most as you eat, sleep, the clothes you like to wear and other things that only a family can know. The family you have around you can often help determine whether your career is a long or short one.
TDS: Do you think it would be great to have a trophy beside you when you retire?

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never advise anyone to think of becoming captain. Then it becomes selfish and secondly, it's not as if you will become successful when you become a captain; it will place unnecessary pressure. It's a process when everything, especially luck, is in your favour of you, only then will you become successful. So I won't advise anyone to start thinking of captaincy to think of captaincy as I have seen many cricketers with that ambition disappear quickly.
TDS: Which particular thing worked well behind your success?
MBM: As a player you can say there is love for the game, but that's normal. With the injuries I faced, others would have gotten frustrated in that scenario, but I never got frustrated and I returned stronger. The main reason is that I wanted to play this game -- that's what was there inside me always. Another thing you can say is my relationship with the players... ever since Naimur

MBM: Not necessarily, but it's not like I don't have the opportunity and maybe if Allah wants and I remain fit I can play till the 2019 World Cup so there is still a chance. But for me that's not necessary, although many have told me that you deserve a trophy. Honestly, that never crossed my mind and these things don't touch me at all. To me it's important to take the team to a stable position.
TDS: Do you want to retire from cricket on your home soil?
MBM: Obviously, I have the desire to do so but it's as if whatever I am planning is going to happen. But if everything goes well and I remain fit, and at the same time the environment is also very crucial for things to go in my favour. I have retired suddenly from T20 cricket but I don't want to do the same in ODIs. But I do have a tendency of taking sudden decisions, and that has happened in my personal life as well. And if everything goes well I wish to let everyone know before I quit this game.

Ind-SL 2nd Test starts today

Fit-again opener Lokesh Rahul has regained his place in India's cricket team to start the second Test against Sri Lanka on Thursday, skipper Virat Kohli said.
 Rahul, who missed the first Test triumph due to viral fever, maintains an impressive average of 44.44 in 17 Tests for India.
 India outplayed the hosts by a record 304 runs in Galle, with openers Shikhar Dhawan and Abhinav Mukund putting in strong performances at the start of the three-match series.
 Speaking on the eve of the Colombo Test, Kohli made it clear that despite their stellar showing, one of the two openers will have to make way for Rahul, who is known as KL.

Chandika's back-up plan

SPORTS REPORTER
 Chandika Hathusingha does not talk that much in public. But when he talks he tries to portray his plans for the future. The Sri Lankan tactician of the Bangladesh cricket team yesterday said that his focus was to increase the national pool so that a more fierce competition is felt in the existing set-up.
 "We are looking at the bigger picture so we have involved 20-odd players. Our main focus is up to 2019 World Cup, at least for me. We need to go on because the amount of cricket we are going to play. All these guys have to get used to playing and training in high intensity. When they train in local cricket, the intensity level and quality of training is not that [intense]. By training with the national players, they can see what the challenges ahead are to break into the team," Hathusingha told reporters after the Tigers' fitness training session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.
 The most successful Bangladesh coach is well aware of the fact that every cricketing nation had to face a period when a huge vacuum in the team arises after the departure of the senior and experienced members of the side or even when a core group of players struggle to perform. The current Sri Lankan team are going through that phase at the moment after the retirement of Kumar Sangakkara and Mahela Jayawardene while West Indies, India, and even Australia went through such phase at certain points.
 The 48-year-old also said that he was trying to create pressure within the team to get the best performance and said that no-one could take their place in the side for granted.
 "It's not about the team at this stage. It's about expanding our pool in case we need to or if someone puts his hand up and says pick me, I am good enough. What we want is [to make sure] no one takes their place for granted and at the same time everyone get into same level. We want to have a scenario where we have enough players for each place," he added.
 He was also excited about the upcoming season, which will start with the two-Test series at home against Australia later this month.
 "We have made some progress in Test cricket. Now we have the game-plan of winning in the sub-continent. We want to win the two Tests against Australia. The challenge is to adapt to the South African conditions, and then adjust the game-plan. We have plans in place to get ready quickly both physically and mentally. The first two weeks in South Africa before the first Test are very crucial," he responded when asked what would be the agenda for the upcoming season with the Tigers touring South Africa after the Australia series.
 The former Sri Lankan cricketer added that he wanted to improve in a few areas to form a more consistent team. Hathusingha also said that the main aim was to win matches against higher ranked teams both home and away.
 Meanwhile, the Tigers, who have been training at the home of Bangladesh cricket since July 10, will travel to Chittagong tomorrow, where they will take part in a three-day match as part of their preparations for the home series against Australia. The second Test will be held in the port city from September 4 while the opening Test will commence in Dhaka on August 27.

Warner sets sights on Bangladesh

Drafting issue delays resolution to pay dispute
SMH
 David Warner started preparations for the Bangladesh Test series as parties worked deep into Wednesday night in a bid to thrash out a peace deal and end Australian cricket's ugly pay dispute.
 As reported by Fairfax Media, there were issues around the drafting of the heads of agreement with concerns focused on revenue share definitions. Industry insiders say the distrust between Cricket Australia (CA) and the Australian Cricketers Association (ACA), which has been present since the start, are a major reason for this week's delays.
 The ACA executive convened on Tuesday morning via teleconference happy with the agreement, but sources say there has been to-ing and fro-ing between the two sides over granular legal points.
 A deal remains vital to the two-Test tour of Bangladesh going ahead. Despite the delay, players are focusing on the upcoming series and are due to head into camp next week in Darwin.
 It will be the first time the Test squad has been together since the memorable series in India where Australia came tantalisingly close to a historic series win.
 "Had my first hit back today -- actually looking forward to getting back into it," Test vice-captain David Warner said on Channel Nine.
 "Look, we're hoping a deal gets done in the next 24 to 48 hours.
 "Obviously I don't know anything that's been happening this morning. Steve spoke



rankings but are no longer easybeats, as seen by drawn series at home against South Africa and England and a last-start win in Sri Lanka in March.
 Unlike Australia, Bangladesh are much deeper into their training having started several weeks ago.
 Australia exceeded expectations in India after being put through one of their most thorough lead-ups for a subcontinental assignment in recent memory, in stark contrast to the bitter fight that has strained player-board relations.

Siddikur back in familiar territory

SPORTS REPORTER
 After a scintillating finish at the Porsche European Open in Hamburg earlier this week, Bangladesh golfer Siddikur Rahman will be among more familiar territories when he tees off at the TAKE Solutions Masters in Bangalore, India today.
 The two-time Asian Tour winner earned a hefty paycheque of 112,600 euros in the Porsche Open, thanks to a third-place finish, which also saw his world ranking jump 110 places from previous 394th.
 However, since that was an event sanctioned solely by the European Tour, that performance didn't have an impact on Siddikur's native tour, the Asian Tour, where he currently stands 17th in the Order of Merit.
 Hence the 32-year-old golfer will be especially keen on doing well in this 300,000-dollar event. The prize purse on offer may not be comparable to European Tour events, but there will be less number of international stars in Bangalore, hence Siddikur will have brightened his chance of breaking his Asian Tour drought this week.
 The Bangladesh golfer hasn't won a title in this circuit since the Hero Indian Open triumph in November 2013, and he will be hoping his excellent form and renewed confidence helps him overcome that mental barrier.
 He will, however, face challenge from quite a few top Indian stars including SSP Chawrasia, Gaganjeet Bhullar, Shiv Kapur and Asian Tour stalwarts like Jeev Milkha Singh and Mardan Mamat.



Fareast International University captain Mainul Abedin Sujoy (L) and his Green University counterpart Bashiruddin hold the Faraz Challenge Cup, which they will be competing for in the final of the Walton Inter University Football in Kamalapur today.

FARAAZ CHALLENGE CUP Rescheduled final today

SPORTS REPORTER
 The postponed final of the Walton 1st Inter University Football Tournament will be held today at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur.
 Green University and Fareast University will vie for the title of the 20-team university tournament. The match will kick off at 4:00pm and will be telecast live on AIN Bangla.
 The final was originally scheduled for July 26, but due to continuous downpour on the preceding days, and other leagues starting around the same time, the fixture was postponed indefinitely.
 The organisers, at a press conference at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday, announced the rescheduling of the final. The winning team will receive a prize money of Tk two lacs along with the Faraz Challenge Cup trophy while the runners-up team will be rewarded Tk one lac, they informed.
 Both team captains reiterated their desire to win the title as well as uphold the spirit of the tournament, which is spreading friendship among students, through this tournament. The organisers, sponsors and officials of both universities attended the press conference.