



Bangladesh Test captain Mushfiqur Rahim (L) jokingly takes away Mominul Haque's (2nd from L) chest guard and hands it to Imrul Kayes (2nd from R) in a light moment at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong yesterday, during the team's preparation for the series against Australia.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

Hockey team lose against Gansu

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh national hockey team surrendered a lead to suffer a 1-2 defeat against Gansu Gobes team in China, in the first of eight preparation matches ahead of the 10th Men's Asia Cup, yesterday.

The charges of Mahbub Harun went ahead in the second quarter, with Ashraf Islam converting a penalty corner against Gansu, which featured six national players of China. However, the hosts hit back in the third quarter from a penalty stroke. Gansu struck the winning goal in the last minute of the fourth quarter from a counter attack to frustrate Bangladesh, who will play three more matches against the same opposition before playing four matches against Jiling Province side. The tour will end on August 18.

"I will not say that our team played well in this match on fast-paced turf, but they tried. The opponents are a balanced side as they have six national players, some senior players and some young players," Mahbub Harun told the Daily Star over phone yesterday.

The next three matches will be played on August 7, 9 and 11, informed Harun, who praised the hosts highly for their hospitality.

Siddikur 29th in Bangalore

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's Siddikur Rahman finished tied for 29th in the TAKE Solution Masters in Bangalore, India yesterday.

The 32-year-old golfer, who started the day in 34th position, finished five places higher after carding two-under-par (69) in the final round at the Karnataka Golf Association Golf Course.

With 73, 71 and 69 in the previous three rounds, Siddikur ended the 300,000-dollar event with an aggregate score of two-under-par (282).

Meanwhile, Poom Saksansin of Thailand, who held the clubhouse lead since the opening round, clinched the title with an overall score of 16-under-par (268) following a 67 in the final round.

India's Khalin Joshi finished in second position, two shots behind the Thai lad while Ajitesh Sandhu of India finished third, a further four shots behind.

O'Neil working on Tigers' mental aspect

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chittagong



There have been high expectations on Soumya Sarkar ever since the dashing left-hander made his debut for the Tigers in 2014. The southpaw displayed all the qualities of a top batsman, but he has been having a rough time recently, averaging just 6.8 in his last five innings as questions arose about his abilities.

Although Soumya has gotten starts in the longest format of the game -- with scores of 10,61,53,71 and 42 in his last five Tests -- the question of converting those starts into big knocks remains.

According to Bangladesh's new batting consultant Mark O'Neil there are no shortcomings in the batsman's technique; instead he had been working more on the 24-year-old's mentality.

"If the ball is there to hit you hit it, there is no way I'm going to change someone's natural game. My job is supposed to be trying to help them do it more consistently and to cut out the bad shots," O'Neil told reporters after training at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury stadium in Chittagong yesterday. "Most of these guys are really good cricketers -- as good as anywhere in the world. It's just a matter of starting to believe. They are all world class cricketers but when they start to do that Australia will have to push really hard to win."

The 58-year-old Australian, who has been appointed for one month, added that the main

thing for a batsman in Test cricket was to remain patient, which was why he has been working on to be more specific with shot selection.

Meanwhile it was yet another day of intense training with skill practice. The bowlers spent some of their time working in the nets and facing the bowling machines to improve their batting skills.

However, rain made the players rush to the gallery for a while as fielding coach Richard Halsall repeatedly poked his head out of the umpire's room and quipped: "Rain stopped yet?"

The downpour lasted 15 minutes, after which training resumed.

Off in a corner, young off-spinner Sanjit Saha -- who was included in the training camp keeping Australia's Nathan Lyon in mind -- said that he was looking to utilise the opportunity and trying to learn from the seniors.

The youngster, who was reported for suspect bowling action for the second time this season in the recently concluded Dhaka Premier League, said that he would take a break of one year to correct his action if needed.

"You have to be very strong to recover from that when your action is suspected. It's a very difficult period for a player. I did not get enough time to correct my action as I had to play matches throughout last year. But this time I have talked with the coaches about how to completely get cleared and they suggested that I stop playing the Premier League and National League for a year. And I'm ready to do that," concluded Sanjit.



MARK O'NEIL

Jadeja show seals series for India

AFP, Colombo



Skipper Virat Kohli Sunday hailed Ravindra Jadeja for his all-round performance in the series-clinching victory against Sri Lanka, saying the left-arm spinner gave the side a great balance.

The celebrations were short-lived, however, after cricket's governing body suspended Jadeja from the third and final Test later this week for dangerous play during his match-winning performance in Colombo.

India crushed the home team by an innings and 53 runs on day four of the second Test in Colombo to take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

Jadeja, the world number one bowler in ICC Test rankings, claimed five second-innings wickets as India bowled out the hosts for 386. He also contributed an unbeaten 70 in India's crushing first innings total of 622-9 declared.

"Guys who have both abilities are very rare to find. That's where we think they're very precious, specially in the longer format because they provide you with great balance," Kohli told reporters.

"He can give you a very quick 60-70 anywhere at any stage and it can really turn the game... he's always in the game. I would say he's a very valuable cricketer for us."

But India will have to make do without him in the final Test starting Saturday in Pallekele, after the International Cricket Council slapped Jadeja with a one-match ban and a fine for dangerous play.

Jadeja fell foul of the umpires after the final delivery of the 58th over when, fielding off his own

bowling, he threw the ball back at batsman Dimuth Karunaratne, who had not left his crease.

The ball narrowly missed him in a manner which the on-field umpires determined as "dangerous", the ICC said in a release.

Sri Lanka had handed India the advantage after being dismissed for 183 in their first innings and conceding a 439-run lead.

But the hosts fought back during their follow-on with a defiant 191-run second-wicket partnership



Spinner Ravindra Jadeja's (L) five-wicket haul powered India to an innings victory against Sri Lanka on the fourth day of the second Test in Colombo yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

'Now is the time to hit my peak'

Over his 10 years as a Bangladesh cricketer, Mahmudullah Riyad has been a true fighter who proved his worth whenever there were questions raised over his ability. The first Bangladesh batsman to hit a World Cup hundred -- and he went on to convert that landmark into a doubly special one by hitting another in the very next match in the 2015 World Cup -- Mahmudullah has seen many ups and downs. The 31-year-old speaks about his regret of missing out on Bangladesh's historic 100th Test, his future plans and about Bangladesh's chances in the upcoming 2019 World Cup during an exclusive interview with *The Daily Star's* Mazhar Uddin. The following are some excerpts of the conversation:

The Daily Star (TDS): How has 10 years of international cricket been for you?

Mahmudullah Riyad (MR): Alhamdulillah, so far so good... If I want to describe the journey I have to say a lot of things, but all I want to say is if I want to achieve the peak I think now is the moment to seize. I think it's the right time for me to perform my best and contribute for the team.

TDS: Who was the inspiration for you to come into cricket?

MR: The main inspiration is my elder brother Emdadullah. Even now he encourages me and inspires me to give my best.

TDS: Which was the toughest period of your career?

MR: There have been many tough periods in my career; it's difficult to chalk out any specific one in my small career as there were many ups and downs. So it's difficult for me to say.

TDS: Do you see yourself as a batsman or an all-rounder?

MR: Batting all-rounder... from the very beginning of my playing career I have preferred myself as a batting all-rounder. And still I see myself as a batting all-rounder who can contribute with the ball as well.

TDS: Do you regret missing Bangladesh's 100th Test?

MR: Obviously there is regret for not playing the 100th Test, but I also realise that I was unable to perform, that's why I couldn't play the 100th Test.

TDS: You had already been in international cricket for seven-plus years before your back-to-back 2015 World Cup centuries. Did you ever feel underrated back then?

MR: No, honestly I never thought that way as I only focus on my game whenever I go out on the field -- how to perform and contribute for the team. That's the only motive I have in my mind and apart from that I don't think about anything else and I don't like to think about anything else.

TDS: How does it feel now being among the five pillars of Bangladesh cricket?

MR: Actually, it depends on each individual and how they perform. If I am not able to perform well

obviously there will be some pressure on me. There is always pressure after the past three years or so the way we have been performing there's a healthy competition in the team. So you have to perform consistently; otherwise it's tough to play at this level.

TDS: You are outwardly a shy person, but according to your national teammates you are one of the pranksters in the team.

MR: I am a shy person but I am very open to those who are close to me. Those who know me -- my friends, colleagues and family members -- I am very free and frank with them. You can say I crack jokes, have fun with people close to me but apart from that I don't feel that interested in those who are out of my zone.

TDS: Where do you want to see yourself when you finish playing?

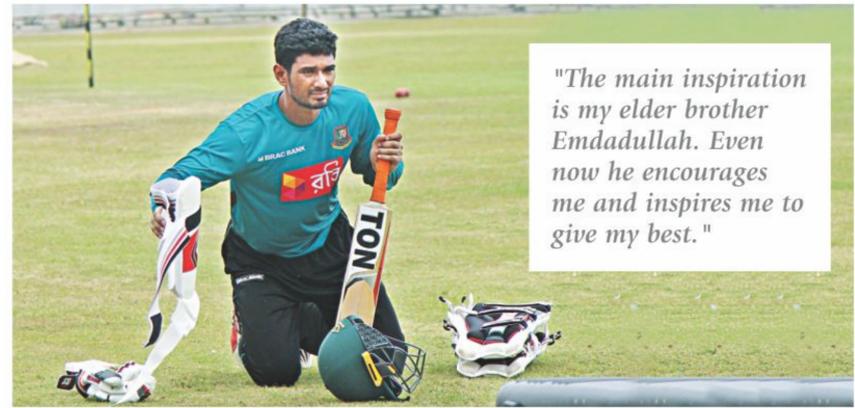
MR: To be honest I never thought that way as I don't set goals; I am just playing the game. I am more focussed on how to play well and perform rather than setting any targets for the future.

TDS: Has the prospect of captaincy ever enticed you?

MR: I was asked the same question a few days back and my answer is still the same -- I am playing as a normal player in the team and thinking of playing the same way and performing consistently for my team. And that's a matter for the future and I will see to that when the situation comes.

TDS: Being a senior member of the team what are the areas Bangladesh should improve in to do well in the 2019 World Cup?

MR: I think it's important to be consistent as we had a very good Champions Trophy this year. We have the Australia series and later the South Africa tour, and they're very important. I think if we can keep our success graph upwards ultimately we can see where we are heading in 2019. Other than that I think 2018 will be very important for us and we have to continue the winning percentage. At the end of the day if we win matches that will really boost us. So we have to do whatever it takes both individually and also team-wise. But I personally believe that we have a very good opportunity and hope it's going to be really good.



"The main inspiration is my elder brother Emdadullah. Even now he encourages me and inspires me to give my best."

Ali takes Eng towards win

AFP, Manchester



Moeen Ali's dashing fifty all but put the fourth Test beyond South Africa's reach as England moved towards a series win at Old Trafford on Sunday.

When rain ended the third's play at 1615 GMT, England were 224 for eight in their second innings -- a lead of 360 runs -- with Ali unbeaten on 67.

South Africa already needed to set a new ground record if they were to end this four-match series all square at 2-2 as no side have made more in the fourth innings of a Test at Old Trafford to win than England's 294 for four against New Zealand in 2008.

Ali made South Africa pay for Dean Elgar dropping him on 15 when a low slip chance off left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj did not stick.

He may come in at No 8 for England but off-spinner Ali -- who earlier in this match took 20 wickets in a Test series for the first time in his career -- made his name with Worcestershire as a top-order batsman.

Ali, who bats left-handed, was especially severe on Maharaj, hitting him for three resounding sixes.

The second of those, a straight drive that saw Ali complete a 49-ball fifty -- was 'caught' on the England dressing-room balcony by wicket-keeper Jonny Bairstow to the delight of the crowd.

SCORES IN BRIEF

ENGLAND: First Innings 362
SOUTH AFRICA: First Innings 226 (Amla 30, Bavuma 46, du Plessis 27; Anderson 4-38, Broad 3-46)
ENGLAND: Second Innings 224 for 8 (Root 49, Ali 67 not out; Morkel 2-39, Rabada 2-37, Olivier 3-38)