

# SPORT



## Tigers seek to fortify their den

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chittagong

Bangladesh cricket has come a long way since April 2006, when they played their last Test against Australia at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong. The Tigers have started to utilise home conditions, which was evident in the series against England last year where Bangladesh managed to level the two-Test series 1-1 with a historic win in the second Test in Dhaka.

The team have been training in Chittagong for the past three days with an aim of maximising their familiarity with conditions at the venue where they will take on the Aussies in the second Test and have the advantage of having practised on the centre wicket.

The 24-strong preliminary squad for the Australia series -- and the tour of South Africa following that -- will partake in a three-day practice match from today. According to Test captain Mushfiqur Rahim it will help give the home side an edge so that if things go well, Bangladesh can give a tough fight to the visitors.

"It's a great opportunity for us to practise on the centre wicket where we are going to play the Test match. In Dhaka we practised in the nets but in Chittagong we are batting on the centre wicket and we are going to play a practice match where most probably we are going to play the Test match against them. The heat in Chittagong is different from Dhaka and the soil in both venues are also different; so our spinners should also know which length they should hit.

"We don't play much in Chittagong as whenever we have a home series we practise at Mirpur. So from that point of view I think it's very good planning, but I hope that all these things will work in our favour, at the end of the day it does not matter much if the result does not come in your favour. So far I am happy with the way we have practised for the last three days and I hope everyone will take the upcoming practice match seriously and from that we can also figure out a Test team," said Mushfiqur to the media after the training session yesterday.

According to the 30-year-old, the Tigers have started to utilise home conditions which they previously were unable to do and are expecting a pitch similar to the one prepared against England last year.

"That's obvious -- we have played many home series previously and if you have noticed there were world-class spinners, batsmen and bowlers in the opposition and we also have a few. The pitch has always helped us but to be honest we were unable to capitalise on that assistance, so we don't want to blame the conditions. It's the players who were unable to utilise the condition previously.

"But for the last two years we are creating opportunities to utilise home conditions properly, both in batting and bowling. That actually gives us the confidence to play well against any top team, including Australia, as we now have few a talented bowlers, batsmen and all-rounders in the Test side, which is very important, and we also have the experience. So I think this is the right time to play against Australia and hopefully we can start well and everyone stays fit," he said.



MUSHFIQUR RAHIM



As the Tigers seek to garner all the home advantage possible with a training camp in Chittagong ahead of the two-Test series against Australia beginning later this month, youngsters Soumya Sarkar (L) and Mustafizur Rahman share a joke on the turf of the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS



Abahani forward Rubel Mia (C) is overjoyed after scoring the decisive goal in the second half stoppage time against archrivals Mohammedan in their Bangladesh Premier League encounter at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

## Rubel settles Dhaka derby

SPORTS REPORTER



A stoppage-time strike from Rubel Mia saw Abahani edge bitter rival Mohammedan 1-0 in the once famous Dhaka Derby at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Having survived a late scare from substitute Kingsley Chigozie, Abahani launched a counter attack from the right to complete a clinical finish in front of an approximately five thousand strong crowd, thanks to a placing shot by right-winger Rubel.

Mohammedan, playing without head coach Syed Naemuddin for this Bangladesh Premier League tie, rued a missed opportunity after Kingsley failed to connect a low cross from Anik Hossain from hand-shaking distance on 90 minutes with Abahani goalkeeper Shahidul Alam beaten. The men in Black and Whites virtually lost their concentration with the game rolling into the three-minute added

time with Abahani grabbing the opportunity with both hands.

Emeka Darlington headed down a cross from the right flank for Jibon, who then fed unmarked Rubel on the right-hand side of the six-yard box and the diminutive winger drove an angular shot past goalkeeper Mamun Khan two minutes into the added time. It was the first time Rubel was involved in a big match between Abahani and Mohammedan.

"It is a memorable strike in my life because Abahani beat Mohammedan with my goal. It was my first match playing for Abahani against Mohammedan. It was also my dream to play such a big match," said an ecstatic Rubel after the encounter.

It was the third straight defeat for Mohammedan while Abahani returned to winning ways and raised their points to six following a shocking defeat at the hands of minnows Farshganj SC.

Mohammedan looked to be brimming with confidence from the outset and fought equally in the first

half against Abahani, who opted to strengthen their backline for this match by drafting in Nigerian defender Adams Samuel Jankasa in place of Nigerian striker Kingsley Chigozie's spot in the starting eleven.

Samuel, along with Linkon, Johurul Islam and Nasirul Islam successfully dealt with any pressure from the opponents to keep the

<b>ABAHANI</b>	<b>1 - 0</b>	<b>MOHAMMEDAN</b>
(RUBEL MIA-90+2)		
<b>TEAM BJMC</b>	<b>0 - 2</b>	<b>CTG ABAHANI</b>
(AFEEZ OLADIPO-63, TOWHIDUL ALAM-73)		

score-sheet clean for ninety minutes before ultimately conceding the decider during stoppage time.

On the other hand, Mohammedan looked tired from the get-go of the second half while Abahani kept the play inside Mohammedan territory and created a couple of good chances. Mohammedan goalkeeper Mamun Khan did manage to thwart all of

Abahani attempts before conceding the lone goal. Abahani striker Emeka also rattled the crossbar once.

In the day's earlier match, Chittagong Abahani extended their winning streak by notching up a 2-0 win over Team BJMC.

After a barren first half, Nigerian striker Afeez Olawale Oladipo and Towhidul Alam Sabuz struck one goal apiece to ensure a third win from as many matches to place the Chittagong outfit on top of the 12-team table with nine points, three more than Sheikh Jamal DC who however, have played a match less.

On the other hand, Team BJMC has one point after suffering two straight defeats.

BJMC held back their superior opponents till the 63rd minute but Afeez broke the deadlock by driving on right-back Mansur Amin's cross from inside the danger zone. Sabuz ultimately wrapped up the victory by shooting an angular pass from Mansur to the far post, raising his goal tally to three from as many matches.

## BD narrowly beaten again

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh national hockey team suffered another narrow defeat in China as they lost to Gansu Goobes 5-4 in the second practice match yesterday.

According to a statement released by the federation, Ashraful Islam struck two goals from penalty corners while Milon Hossain and Hasan Jubair Niloy netted one goal each. However, the statement did not list the time of the goals as well as the opponent's scorers.

CHAMPIONSHIP LEAGUE

## Ripon's heroics go in vain

SPORTS REPORTER

Uttar Baridhara Club came from two goals down to hold newcomers Bashundhara Kings to a 2-2 draw in their Marcel Bangladesh Championship League fixture at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

Ripon Alam gave Bashundhara the lead in stoppage time of the first half before doubling it nine minutes into the second. However, Bashundhara had to surrender the lead in face of pressure from Baridhara Club, an outfit that were demoted to the second-tier professional football league last season.

Dalim pulled one goal back in the 80th minute before Sujan levelled the margin four minutes from time.

## Aus at risk of slide to sixth

AAP



Australia risk an embarrassing slide down the Test rankings if they are unable to conquer Bangladesh in the upcoming two-match series.

Steve Smith's side landed in India earlier this year with a chance of reclaiming top spot on the International Cricket Council's charts.

Now they will tumble to number six if Bangladesh win both games during the two-Test series that starts on August 27.

The prospect of sitting above only Sri Lanka, West Indies, Bangladesh and Zimbabwe would hardly instil confidence ahead of this summer's Ashes.

Such a fall from grace is unlikely but far from impossible.

Bangladesh, who defeated England at home in 2016, are no longer the hapless group of easy-beats that Jason Gillespie memorably mauled during his unbeaten double-century in Chittagong some 11 years ago.

"It'll be hard and I don't think they believe it will be anything but hard," former Australia skipper Ian Chappell said.

"Not so much because of the pay dispute, it'll be hard because the conditions there are difficult and in the last 12-18 months Bangladesh have really improved.

"This will be a difficult tour."

It will be Australia's first outing since the bitter pay saga came to a head, partly because of players' refusal to tour Bangladesh without an agreement.

Smith and the vast majority of his teammates haven't donned the whites since losing a four-Test series in India some four months ago.

Some Test squad members were slated to tour South Africa with Australia A last month but that trip was boycotted amid the industrial standoff.

"It obviously took a bit longer than both parties would want. Certainly as a coach, you wanted it sorted a bit quicker," coach Darren Lehmann told radio station Triple M when asked about the dispute.

"It was a little bit frosty, wasn't it? But they'll certainly get back together.

"Now the challenge for us is to play some bloody good cricket... and entertain the fans, get the fans back on side."

Australia snapped a nine-Test losing streak in Asia with a shock victory over India in Pune in February. They were competitive throughout that series in a 2-1 loss.

The Test squad, including recent additions Mitchell Swepson and Jackson Bird, will head to Darwin for a pre-tour training camp later this week.

## Shakib, Jamaica bounce back

STAR SPORT DESK

The teams, the venue and the result margin were identical, but Shakib Al Hasan's performance was the polar opposite and that proved to be the difference as the Jamaica Tallawahs defeated the Barbados Tridents by 12 runs in the Caribbean Premier League on Sunday.

Just a day after a lacklustre display from the Bangladesh T20I skipper, Shakib and Jamaica avenged their opening 12-run defeat to Barbados with a clinical performance in Lauderhill.

Kumar Sangakkara won the toss and elected to bat first. Lendl Simmons and Andre McCarthy took Jamaica to 65 for the loss of their captain in 10 overs, but three wickets in a span of four balls saw them facing another defeat.

That is when Shakib stepped in and changed the course of the game. The left-hander blitzed his way to an unbeaten 32-ball 44 and smashed five boundaries and a six, lifting Jamaica to 154.

Barbados were helpless in reply, thanks to Jamaica's Asian bowlers. They lost their last wicket off the last ball of the match with the scoreboard reading 142.

Shakib took a wicket and gave away 28 runs, while Imad Wasim took one for 20. However, the pick of the bowlers was Mohammad Sami, who took four wickets and gave away just 12 runs in four overs.

## Ali spins Eng to series win

AFP, Manchester



Moeen Ali finished a brilliant campaign with a five-wicket haul as England beat South Africa by 177 runs in the fourth Test at Old Trafford yesterday to seal a 3-1 series win.

Victory, achieved with more than a day to spare, also saw Joe Root triumphant in his first Test series as England captain.

South Africa, set a huge 380 for victory, were bowled out for 202 shortly after tea

on the fourth day when Ali took two wickets in two balls to remove Morne Morkel and Duanne Olivier.

That gave the off-spinner a return of five for 69 in 19.5 overs and 25 wickets in total in a series where he also scored 252 runs.

"This series I have felt more consistent with bat and ball, especially ball. I felt good rhythm after the first game. I contributed with the bat a couple of times," Ali told BBC Radio's Test Match Special.

"In general, I'm very pleased," the 30-year-old Worcestershire all-

rounder added.

This result meant England had won their first home Test series against South Africa since 1998.

SCORES IN BRIEF

ENGLAND: First innings 362  
SOUTH AFRICA: First innings 226  
ENGLAND: Second innings 243 (Ali not out 75, Root 49; Morkel 4-41)  
SOUTH AFRICA: Second innings 202 (Amla 83, du Plessis 61; Ali 5-69)  
Result: England won the series 3-1  
Player-of-the-match: Moeen Ali

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