

SPORT



ODI captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (R) and his deputy Shakib Al Hasan (C) listen intently to coach Chandika Hathurusingha's words during a practice session at the Manguing Oval in Bloemfontein yesterday.

Mash & Co brighten mood

SPORTS REPORTER from Bloemfontein



It is no secret that when it comes to Bangladesh, 50-over cricket is where it is at. The current tour of South Africa is structured in a way that reflects that. The three ODIs starting with the first one in Kimberley on October 15, have been placed as the meat of the tour with the 200s to follow. There are also three ODIs, as opposed to two Tests and two T20is.

The rest of the Test players – Test-only players Shafiqul Islam, Subhash Roy and Tajul Islam will head back home on Wednesday – were cooling their heels a day after the innings and 254-run defeat, but it was apparent that the inspirational Mashrafe's presence will not take long in lifting the spirits. The most beloved cricketer in Bangladesh was at first all business when bowling in Nasir in the nets and then having an extended session with the bat. His bat cracked while facing a full-paced delivery from a net bowler, but true to form, he carried on batting while someone fetched a fresh bat, only stopping when it was apparent that the bat would soon split in two.

Shahab was in relaxed mood too, jovially signalling sixes when his captain pounded them as only he can. With the round of these two stalwarts, suddenly the picture seemed brighter. After Mashrafe was done batting and practice had ended, the man from Narail was overheard regaling those around him with stories about the flight from Johannesburg Bloemfontein, which was undertaken amid a thunderstorm on Sunday afternoon. Not very fond of flying, the turbulence usual had Mashrafe scared when he saw the unflappable Shakib getting nervous.

BCB 'concerned' over Mushfiqur's remarks

SPORTS REPORTER



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Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan yesterday said that they are concerned over the recent comments made by Tigers Test captain Mushfiqur Rahim during their 2-0 Test series loss to South Africa.

"Making this kind of comments outside the country was not good and he cannot say such things. No matter what happens with coach or management... rather it is related with the country's image. He [Mushfiqur] should understand that these kinds of comments tarnish the image of country's cricket," said Hassan while speaking to reporters yesterday.

The BCB boss made these comments as he reacted to Mushfiqur's remarks on 'being made to field deep' and his decision to bowl first in both Tests. Mushfiqur caused a minor stir on the first day of the second Test when he said that his decision to spend time in the deep and not guide his bowlers was dictated by the team management, who felt that he was not an adequate fielder.

"I think in the back of his mind there has been something playing. Something has been bothering him and he has been feeling uncomfortable. I don't know the exact reason but it might come from the coach, management or from us. We have to sort it out why he is feeling the problem," Hassan said.

"We are not thinking about it [regarding the future of Mushfiqur's captaincy] but the board is concerned with his statements. What he had said in his statements and what information we got from there is not the same. So we will have to find out the problem. We have to investigate to find out the exact reasons behind what kind of problems he has been facing. We will need to know the specific reasons," he continued.

"Hassan also said that they will wait to wait for the team's return before they try to solve the problem.

"We have time. Let's finish the tour first and we'll sit with him [Mushfiqur] after their return and will try to sort out the problem. If something is bothering him we will definitely try to solve it. But if we realise that nothing will solve those problems and it will best for him if we release him from captaincy then we will decide but right at this moment we are not thinking anything about it," said Hassan.



NAZMUL HASSAN

Limited-over obsession harming Tests

SAKEB SUBHAN from Bloemfontein



While Bangladesh's cricketers should be admonished and condemned for their abject showing in South Africa, where they lost the two Tests in Potchefstroom and Bloemfontein by 333 runs and an innings and 254 runs respectively, it should also be asked whether the right personnel have been chosen to do well in Test cricket, whether home or away. In both batting and bowling, there has been question marks over some players heading into this tour, and by the end of the two Tests, those question marks have just grown.

The faith in the same players, regardless of their results in Tests, seems to suggest that Tests are really not important, not as much as ODIs or T20I cricket anyway. Such an attitude was showcased when before the last two World Twenty20s, scheduled Test matches were jettisoned to shoehorn in more T20is.

Soumya Sarkar's technique is faulty, even in conditions where the ball does not move around. He overcame his lack of feet movement and loose hands outside off stump while giving notice of his talent with a superb 86 in Christchurch in January and followed that up with a string of three consecutive fifties in the first two Tests in Sri Lanka. But some mood of dismissal and his strike rates over those innings point to an opener unwilling to graft, as the surfaces in places away from the subcontinent sometimes fall for.

This temperament ill-suited to the format was further in evidence in some

of the shots he played to get out in Sri Lanka and the home series against Australia. In the second innings in Galle, he played an ill-advised pull at the start of the third day. In the second innings of the second Test in Colombo, at the start of a tricky chase, he gave Rangana Herath the charge and holes out. In the second innings of the Dhaka Test against Australia, he did the same thing against Ashton Agar. In between those dismissals were many where way falls resulted in edges behind the wicket or to the slip cordon. Since his half centuries in the first three innings in Sri Lanka have been scores of 10, 8, 15, 33, 9, 9, 2 and 3 – the last two being in the most recent Test in Bloemfontein where in the first innings, he was an opener unsure of where his leg stump was, and in the

second innings was the classic Soumya dismissal – caught at slip. Sabir Rahman is quite another case. His technique is solid but he has possibly the worst temperament among the current side. Since his twin 50s in Wellington in January, he has averaged 39.85 over 14 innings. Highlights over that time have been twin 40s in the 100th Test in Colombo and 66 in the first innings in Chittagong against Sri Lanka. In the four innings in South Africa, he has recorded scores of 30, 4, 0 and 4.

The preference given to ODI players – Sabir and Soumya are prime examples – is illustrated perfectly when you consider the string of scores that led to the Mominul Haque, a Test specialist, being dropped for the Colombo Test. Since the start of the year he had scores

of 64, 23, 12, 27, 7 and 5 before the Colombo Test.

If the batting woes can be looked at through individual players, the bowling is in much worse health, especially when touring abroad. While the spin trio of Shakib Al Hasan, Mehedi Hasan Miraz and Tajul Islam can be expected to bowl sides out at home, no current pacer other than Mustafizur Rahman can put hand on heart and say that they are Test players. Taskin Ahmed averages 97.4 per wicket. Rubel Hossain averages 79. Subhash Roy averages 51.7 and Shafiqul Islam 55.4.

More than mere stats, none of the four mentioned can bowl consistently on a line and length to frustrate good batsmen on good pitches, nor can they sustain their pace over a Test day, except Rubel. For this, a legend though he is, fast bowling coach Gourmeer Walsh will have to take some of the blame for not being able to instil longer-session skills in bowlers who are predominantly tuned to ODI cricket, as proven by Tasmin and Rubel's far superior figures in ODI cricket.

As far as it is not like these 15 cricketers are the only ones available to Bangladesh. Soumya and Sabir may be promising cricketers in the ODI format, with a view to the 2019 World Cup, but domestic cricketers like Naem Islam and Marshall Ayub, to name just two, have been displaying longer-session temperament at piling on the runs for years. There are bowlers like Robiul Islam and Mohammad Shahid, who although not spectacular, have shown a far greater appreciation for the demands of longer session pace bowling than any of the bowlers named above.



Soumya Sarkar (L) and Sabir Rahman continued their miserable form with the bat during the recent Test series against South Africa. PHOTOS: APP FILE

ICC set to approve Test Championship

AFP, Wellington

The International Cricket Council (ICC) is set to approve plans for its long-awaited World Test Championship at a meeting in New Zealand this week, it was reported Monday.

The sport's governing body has argued for years that a Test Championship is needed to boost the five-day format's popularity as crowds and television viewers look at the big-hitting Twenty20 version of the game.

But squabbling over format and fees that some nations would be disadvantaged and efforts to launch a league structure since 2010.

The Sydney Morning Herald reported that plans for a nine-nation Test championship were now well advanced and the ICC was set to give the concept a green light on Friday at a meeting in Auckland.

It said the first edition of the competition would run over a two-year cycle beginning in 2019, culminating in a final between the top two teams at Lord's.

'A lot to work on'

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With no prior warning, it was Bangladesh cricket has recently entered a poor run of form for both the senior and juniors.

The Tigers faced a brutal 2-0 thrashing in the just concluded Test series against South Africa while the Bangladesh Under-19 team also received a major blow when they lost the five-match series at home against Afghanistan Under-19 3-1.

It is disappointing to lose against Afghanistan but it is not the end of the world," said Bangladesh Under-19 team batting coach Abdul Karim to the Daily Star yesterday.

"We batted badly and paid the price for it while some of their batsman just took the game away from us by playing some aggressive brand of cricket. This group of cricketers has just come from the Under-17 side and they are still young and learning," he continued.

According to Karim, the lack of match practice is also one of the main reasons behind Bangladesh's downfall to their Afghan counterparts. However, he added that there is still some time left for the players to gather momentum.

BPL opener on Nov 4

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The 5th edition of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL T20) will begin on November 4 instead of November 3 in order to observe the Jall Killing Day, as it will take place on December 12 at the Sher-e-Bangla National stadium in Mirpur.

Despite the league phase of the tournament being bodily shifted, the date for the final match remains unchanged and will take place on December 12 at the Sher-e-Bangla National stadium in Mirpur.

The Sylhet International Cricket Stadium will mark its debut as a BPL venue with the introduction of local franchisee Sylhet Sixers before they take on defending champions Dhaka Dynamites in the opening match of the seven-team competition.

This season's BPL will be played in three cities – Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet.

Ireland A in Sylhet

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The Ireland A team arrived in Bangladesh on Sunday and have already reached Sylhet to take part in a four-day game against the Bangladesh A team, starting from October 12 at the Sylhet International Cricket stadium.

The visitors will also take part in a five-match one day series, which will take place on October 17, 21, 24 and 26, where all the fixtures will be played at the Sheikh Kamal International cricket stadium in Cox's Bazar.

Anticlimactic finish

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The fourth and final day of the fourth round was expected to be an exciting conclusion to the 19th National Cricket League, however, all the matches across the country ended in draws yesterday while rain once again played spoilsport.

It was a close encounter between Chittagong and Dhaka Metro at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury stadium in Chittagong but the hosts should be glad with the result as they struggled over 97 for 6 in the end of the match where Dhaka Metro set a target of 274 runs.

Dhaka Metro's Saykat Ali and Nihad Uz Zaman shared a 50-run wicket at the Zahur keenly contested affair where Sadkur Rahman top scored for the port city outfit with 33 runs.

Resuming the day on a first innings 216 for 8, Chittagong were all-out on 261 runs after their number 10 batsman Wahidul Islam struck a quick fifty to close out the innings.

Dhaka Metro then scored some quick runs in their second innings when Shamsur Rahman struck a blistering 67 ball 102 run knock, which featured eight fours and five sixes, remaining unbeaten as his side

SCORES IN BRIEF		
BARISALVS DHAKA DIV DHAKA: 258 and 110 for 1 in 38 overs (Rakibul 39 not out, Zahiduzzaman 37; Sarim: 229)	CHITTAGONG : 261 all-out in 102 overs (Shahzad 73, Nuruzzaman 68, Shamzul 56, Shohag 44-4-2)	RESULTS MATCHDRAWS CHITTAGONGVS DHAKA METRO
DHAKA METRO : 369 for 9 declared and 165 for 3 in 27 overs (Shamzul 102 not out, Asif 20; Belal 1-2)	CHITTAGONG : 261 all-out in 90.5 overs (Sazzadul 59, Wahidul 58; Asif 3-6-5)	RESULTS MATCHDRAWS KHULNASVS RANGPUR KHULNA: 218 and 141 in 43 overs (Mahesh 88, Rubul 29)
RANGPUR : 317 for 9 declared (Jahid 115, Shamsur 102; Asif 20; Mahesh 52)	RESULTS MATCHDRAWS RAJSHAHVS SYLHET SYLHET: 221 all-out and 151 for 2 in 63 overs (Imtiaz 108, Anwar 36)	RESULTS MATCHDRAWS RAJSHAHVS SYLHET RAJSHAH: 370 for 1 in 77 overs (Mizanur 145, Zanzar 89; Jayed 4-0; Imran 3-101)