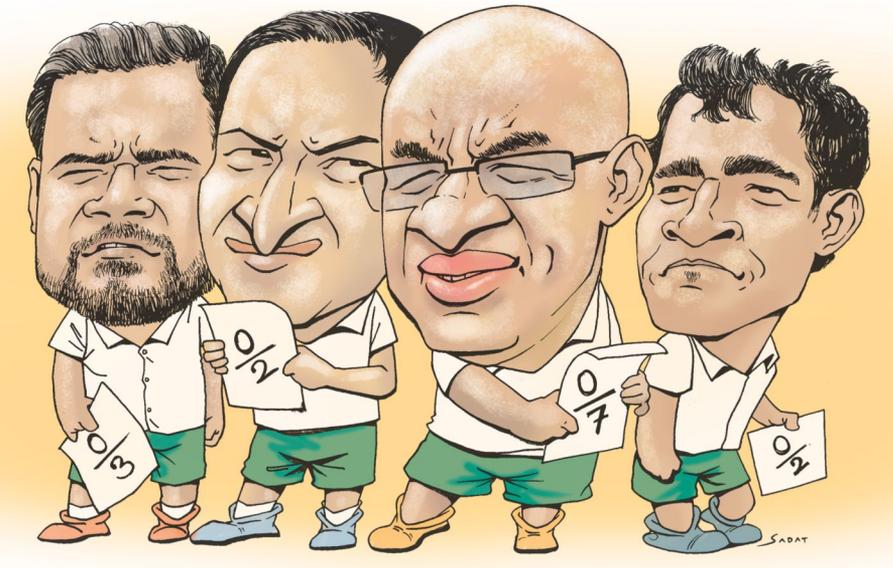


SPORTS



'Blame game will not help'

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh national cricket team will return home from their long and devastating South Africa tour in the morning today. However, the players will have the opportunity to quickly shrug off that tiring experience as their attention should shift to the Bangladesh Premier League, which kicks off on November 4 in Sylhet, before they prepare for the home series against Sri Lanka in January.

Just like opener Tamim Iqbal, former national team captain turned selector Habibul Bashar also believes that Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) will need to launch a thorough investigation to root out the reasons behind the South Africa debacle because the question at hand is not only why they suffered a 7-0 defeat but rather why were their performances so poor in all aspects.

"There was something wrong somewhere and we must identify it. It will not be good for our cricket if we don't examine everything but we must do it keeping aside all the emotional factors. I am not ready to accept that we failed because lack of ability. Many tried to say that this team is only good at home but I request them not to forget their performance in 2015 World Cup, ICC Champions Trophy and even in the New Zealand tour," said Bashar yesterday.

"The blame-game will not help us rather we need to dig deep to find the reasons behind why they played so badly when even the condition was not totally unfavorable. Was there anything wrong in selection? Had there been any deficiencies in preparation? Was there any psychological issue? Or whether we failed to overcome our long-standing problem of suffering from the early mistakes or bad performances? We should ask all the questions without any hesitation and only then we can avoid such a poor showing in the future," continued Bashar.

Much has already been said about the bowlers' perfor-



The Bangladesh Premier League is barely a week away. But selector Habibul Bashar (L) feels that they should not forget a forgettable South Africa tour in the festivity of the glamorous domestic T20 competition. PHOTO: STAR

A month of hard knocks

SAKEB SUBHAN from Johannesburg

The end-of-tour feeling is markedly different between the South African tour and Bangladesh's last full tour earlier this year in March-April, when the Tigers came away with a share of each of the three series they contested in Sri Lanka. That journey ended with a win in the second T20, while this one has ended with a royal hammering in the tour-ending match on Sunday, when Bangladesh suffered their second-heaviest defeat in T20s. After Sri Lanka it seemed that Bangladesh had taken a step forward; after South Africa it seemed as if they took two steps back.

T20 captain Shakib Al Hasan is known for not betraying his true emotions, and although he managed a smile here and there, even he could not find positives from their month-long tour. "It is difficult to identify positives in such situations," he said after the second T20 in Potchefstroom. "There were some here and there, but none of us were consistent. Mushfiq [Rahim] bhai batted well in the ODI, Rubeel [Hossain] bowled well in every match except today. But it's important to get a lot of contributions like those if we want to win."

WORST TOUR SINCE 2008

The results on tour make for sorry reading: loss by 333 runs in the first Test in Potchefstroom; by an innings and 254 runs in the second Test in Bloemfontein; by 10 wickets, 104 runs and 200 runs in the ODI; and 20-run and 85-run defeats in the two

T20s. One would have to go back to their last visit to South Africa in 2008 to find a tour of such one-sided results. Even then, the closest result was closer than the closest one on this tour, as Bangladesh lost the only T20 in 2008 by 12 runs.

They may have lost all matches in New Zealand earlier this year, but as Shakib himself admitted, on that tour there were a number of matches that they looked like winning, and they were on course to draw the first Test in Wellington until a fifth-day implosion. Here, in Shakib's words, Bangladesh 'did not compete in any matches'.

MENTAL WEAKNESS

Perhaps the most concerning factor here was the mental weakness displayed by the Tigers. Shakib said on Sunday that they are not yet a team that are mentally strong enough to chase down a total in excess of 220 in T20s – a damning assessment but also an honest one in light of this tour.

"We have a break from international cricket now, so the effort will be to work hard and improve our mental fitness, which I think is more important to attain than physical fitness. The physical is important too of course, but if we can overcome the mental block then we can move forward."

While it is true that the absences through injury of Tamim Iqbal for all but two of the matches on tour and that of Mustafizur Rahman for the five limited-over games were significant setbacks, the utter lack of a will to fight in their absence was a jarring reminder of where they stand as a team.

South Africa played much of the series without their first-choice bowling line-up. Vernon Philander, Dale Steyn and Chris Morris did not take part in the series. Morne Morkel was out injured from the second Test onwards and Kagiso Rabada sat out the T20 series. Yet a most inexperienced bowling lineup blew the Tigers away in the last match and snuffed out the only show of fight from Bangladesh in the first T20.

South Africa have much greater depth, but instead of taking that for granted – as the cricketers seem to have done over the past month – now may be a good time to ask why Bangladesh cannot come close to matching that.

"People will have personal opinions, but I won't say that we have to start thinking about turning things upside down after just one series," was how Shakib responded to a question about ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza characterising the 3-0 loss as 'alarming'. "It is a little normal that results like this will happen on overseas tours. Maybe it was expected that we would lose, but we did not expect to play the cricket we did to lose the way we did. We all know what our ability is, and none of us could perform up to that. So in that regard I am sure that everyone, starting with the BCB, the coaching staff and its players – will work hard to overcome it, which is important if we want to move forward."

WILL THE RIGHT QUESTIONS BE ASKED?

It is said that there is more to learn from defeats than wins, and in that respect this

has been a valuable tour for Bangladesh. A lot of concerns have been thrown up in South Africa, and it is pertinent that the powers that be ask the right questions, including of themselves. By the end of the Test series a clear conflict seemed to have arisen between captain Mushfiqur Rahim and coach Chandika Hathurusingha and that has to be addressed; not just to censure Mushfiqur for lashing out publicly but also to ask if the coach has too much of a say for players' comfort. Throughout the tour it was the long-suffering captains who faced the questions and Hathurusingha hid behind closed practice sessions. Is the coach prioritised above the captains by the board?

Hathurusingha and the board will do well to sit together and ask a few questions. Is it right that the Sri Lanka has a say in squad selection even though he does not stay in the country between international assignments to see domestic talent first-hand? Is taking 22-member squads to training camps abroad enough for him to have an idea of the breadth of talent in the country? Given his club, is this perhaps the answer to the lack of depth in the player stocks?

Shakib seemed to be against sea changes, but the silver lining of this dark tour is that there is now an opportunity to make meaningful, beneficial changes. The next level for Bangladesh cricket is doing well in places like South Africa. Once the home matches start and Bangladesh start doing well again, all these real problems will be swept under the carpet, until another South African disaster occurs.

BCB polls today

All eyes on ex-captain Naimur

SPORTS REPORTER

All eyes will be on former Bangladesh captain Naimur Rahman in the Bangladesh Cricket Board elections today.

Save Naimur and MA Awal Chowdhury Bulu, the other candidates of the incumbent BCB president Nazmul Hassan led panel have already been elected unopposed.

A councillor from Manikganj, Naimur will batle it out against three politically heavyweight candidates – Syed Ashfaqul Islam, Shahinul Islam and Tanvir Ahmed Tito – for the two available director posts from Dhaka Division.

On the other hand, Naimur will be up against Alamgir Khan for the lone director's post from Barisal Division.

The BCB general council was scheduled to elect 25 directors from three categories. But the other 23 directors, including 12 from Dhaka Metropolitan Clubs (Category-2), have already been elected unopposed, which understandably took the gloss out of an election atmosphere in the country's richest federation.

And if everything goes according to script, Hassan is all set to lead the 25-member executive committee (including two nominated directors from the NSC) and run the show for another four years.

The election for the three posts will take place from 10am till 5pm at the Sher-e-Bangla National stadium, where the primary results will be announced on the same day.



NAIMUR RAHMAN

Ton-up Kohli claims top spot

AFP, New Delhi

Virat Kohli reclaimed his throne as the world's best one-day international batsman Monday after smashing his sixth ton in the year in India's series-clinching victory over New Zealand.

The India skipper, who cracked a 106-ball 113 in Kanpur, surpassed South Africa's AB de Villiers as number one as he resumed the top spot after a gap of just 10 days.

Kohli was the top run-scorer in the New Zealand series, accumulating 263 over three matches including his 32nd ODI century on Sunday as India secured a 2-1 series victory.

He also paired with opener Rohit Sharma for a 230-run stand as they became the first batsmen to share four double century ODI partnerships.

Kohli, 28, who also tops the Twenty20 batting chart, also became the fastest batsman to reach 9,000 ODI runs in the game at Kanpur's Green Park Stadium.

Windies steady in reply

AFP, Baltimore

The West Indies made a solid start to their innings after dismissing Zimbabwe for 326 on the second day of the second Test at Queens Sports Club on Monday.

After the home side were bowled out in the hour after lunch, West Indies opens Kraig Brathwaite and Kieran Powell cautiously guided their side close to stumps before Brathwaite got out for 32. The visitors finished the day on 78-1 with Powell underdressed on 43.

Zimbabwe leg-spinner Graeme Cremer struck late to end a turgid opening stand and keep the West Indies in check.

Earlier, the home innings was built on the back of Hamilton Masakadza's superb 147 and Sikandar Raza's crucial 80.

The pair resumed their fifth-wicket partnership on the second morning with Zimbabwe on 169 for four, and extended the stand to 90 as they saw off the first 21 overs of the day.

However Zimbabwe fell from 146 for four to 267 for seven when Masakadza top-edged a delivery from legspinner Devendra Bishoo and was caught by wicketkeeper Shane Dowrich, and Malcolm Waller and Regis Chakabva both departed cheaply.

Raza stabilised the innings briefly alongside captain Graeme Cremer, but the West Indies took the second new ball after lunch and needed just 55 deliveries to wrap up the tail.

Raza was caught at second slip off the bowling of Shannon Chirore, while Cremer was run out and debutant Tendai Gabriel was trapped low by Kumar Roach, who finished with figures of 3 for 44.

SCORE IN BRIEF

ZIMBABWE: First innings 326 all out in 109.1 overs (Masakadza 147, Moor 52, Raza 80, Gabriel 2-64, Roach 3-4, Bishoo 2-82)

WEST INDIES: First innings 78-1 in 49 overs (Brathwaite 32, Powell 43 not out; Cremer 1-31)

'I'm a good man'

AFP, Sydney

West Indies cricketer star Chris Gayle Monday won a defamation case against an Australian media group which claimed he exposed his genitals to a massage therapist.

The lurid accusations were made by Fairfax Media newspaper the Sydney Morning Herald, The Age and The Canberra Times in a series of stories in January last year.

They claimed the all-rounder exposed himself to team masseuse Leanne Russell in a dressing room at the 2015 World Cup in Sydney and "indecently propositioned" her.

Gayle denied the allegations, saying the journalists behind the story wanted to "destroy him".

His teammate Dwayne Smith, who was in the changing room at the time, also denied the incident took place.

A NSW Supreme Court jury ruled in Gayle's favour, finding Fairfax was motivated by malice.

The media group had defended the articles on the basis the allegations were substantially true and in the public interest.

"At the end of the day I'm very, very happy," Gayle said after the verdict, according to the Herald, adding that coming to court had been "very emotional".

"I'm a good man. I'm not guilty," he said.

The publication of the stories followed an uproar after Gayle attempted to flirt with an Australian presenter on live TV, asking her out for a drink and telling her: "Don't blush, baby."

During the week-long hearing, a fearful



CHRIS GAYLE leaves court after winning his defamation case against Fairfax Media.



RUSSELL stood by the allegations, saying she had gone to the room looking for a towel and came across Gayle.

She alleged he lowered the towel he was wearing and asked: "Are you looking for this?"

Gayle's close friend Donovan Miller told the hearing that because the allegations the West Indian had become "scared, especially (around) females and he always feels someone is out to get him."

A hearing on damages will be held at a later date.