

SPORT



Comilla Victorians skipper Tamim Iqbal (R) may be back in action tomorrow, but Rajshahi Kings' pace sensation Mustafizur Rahman's (C) return from injury will take some more time as the BPL starts its Dhaka phase today.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Crickertainment in capital from today

SPORTS REPORTER



Unlike the high demand and scramble for match tickets that created headlines during the Sylhet phase of the Bangladesh Premier League, there was not as much fanfare for the tournament's resumption in Dhaka today after two days' break.

However, the crowd will surely come in numbers as the intensity among the seven teams will be at its peak when Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's Rangpur Riders takes on Darren Sammy's Rajshahi Kings in the first game of the day, starting from 1:30 pm at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium.

The second fixture of the day between defending champions Dhaka Dynamites and high-flying newcomers Sylhet Sixers will start at 6:30 pm.

The local players will look to shift gears after a dismal show in the Sylhet phase as none of the Bangladeshi players found a place in the top five run-scorers' list so far while Sylhet's Tajul Islam, with five wickets in four games, is behind his English teammate Liam Plunkett with six scalps.

The runners-up of the previous edition, Rajshahi Kings, are in search of their first win of the tournament after losing both games in Sylhet. The Kings will once again face Rangpur and Sammy will look for an improvement in the catching department

after a few dropped catches cost0 his side their opening game against the Riders.

Tigers Test captain Mushfiqur Rahim, who has so far had a quiet time with the bat for Rajshahi with a pair of 11s in the two games, will be eager to get back among the runs.

Mashrafe's Rangpur went on to lose their second game against Chittagong Vikings by 11 runs and the Bangladesh ODI skipper will definitely want both his locals and foreigners to fire in crunch situations. He will also want to settle on an opening pair as three players tried so far -- Johnson Charles, Luis Reece and Ziaur Rahman -- not being able to provide a good start in both games.

On the other hand, after a fantastic stint at their home ground during which they won the first three games on the trot before a six-wicket defeat against Khulna Titans, Sylhet will look to return to winning ways.

Their two in-form foreign openers, Upul Tharanga and Andre Fletcher, have been terrific so far and has given the big starts to make spirited skipper Nasir Hossain happy. Sylhet managed to beat the defending champion comfortably by nine wickets in the tournament opener and will want to replicate the performance against the Dynamites today.

Shakib Al Hasan's Dhaka however managed to come back strongly in their second game, beating Khulna Titans comfortably by 65 runs and the star-studded side will only get stronger after the inclusion of Pakistan super star Shahid Afridi.

Resignation dominates discussion

SPORTS REPORTER



The teams have started training for the Dhaka phase of the fifth edition of the Bangladesh Premier League which gets underway today, but the centre of all discussion at the National Academy ground in Mirpur yesterday was the news of Bangladesh head coach Chandika Hathurusingha's resignation.

The news spread like wildfire after Bangladesh Cricket Board president Nazmul Hassan revealed on Thursday that the 49-year-old had submitted a resignation letter midway through the recent tour of South Africa. Hassan said on Thursday that although Hathurusingha previously used to confide in him, the letter came out of the blue even for the BCB boss.

It can be mentioned that there has been some tension between the coach and the senior players of the team recently, while many are speculating that the distance between board and coach increased since Mominul Haque's re-inclusion into the Test squad for the home series against Australia in August this year.

BCB officials have tried in vain to communicate with Hathurusingha, and it was learned that a few of the senior players also called him but there was no response from the Sri Lankan.

Everyone seemed to be whispering about Hathurusingha's resignation and eager to know the reason behind it but there were not much in

the way of shock among the cricketers except juniors like Soumya Sarkar and Mehedi Hasan Miraz, who were a bit surprised. Understandably however, none of the seniors were willing to go on record in their comments about the issue.

Former Bangladesh captain and BCB director Khaled Mahmud, who is also the current coach of Dhaka Dynamites, did however express his surprise over Hathurusingha's resignation, informing that even during his five-day visit to South Africa -- which according to the timeline provided by Hassan on Thursday may have been shortly after the letter was sent to the board -- he did not have any clue about the issue.

"We heard about it now but I had no idea about this even when I was in South Africa; he did not say anything to me. I have a very good relationship with him as we have been working together for the past two-and-a-half years. I was surprised after hearing the news and we don't know the exact reason for his resignation, hopefully we will get to know after talking to him and everything will be clear after that. He played a vital role in Bangladesh cricket and he has a great contribution in the recent progress of the team," Mahmud told the reporters yesterday.

But there were questions after the way Hathurusingha resigned as his contract with the BCB is until the 2019 World Cup, but Mahmud was not willing to blame the Sri Lankan when asked whether his sudden decision could damage the image of the board.

"I can only say on behalf of the board that the BCB has supported him throughout but every individual has his own decision and that's his personal matter. I don't think Hathurusingha will say anything which will damage the image of the board. Maybe there were personal reasons while if there is any other reason we will listen to that. But that's how it goes; if someone wants to go someone new will come," he said.

Mahmud also informed that he is ready to take up the role of head coach if the board offers it to, adding that previously he has taken the challenge of being the captain when Bangladesh were struggling to perform. However, the BCB is still hopeful of a resolution like on the previous occasions -- in 2016 -- when Hathurusingha tried to resign.

Meanwhile, another former Bangladesh captain Faruque Ahmed said that the way Hathurusingha resigned was not very professional, but added that it is only natural that a coach will not stay with a team forever.

"Foreign coaches will come and go; that's normal, but the way he gave the resignation letter was very unprofessional as he has the contract with BCB till the 2019 World Cup. I think the BCB has done well in their dealings with him. He is probably the highest paid coach employed by the country so far and he also wielded a lot of authority. But obviously he should have informed it earlier rather than resigning in such a way," Faruque said.



Sylhet Sixers' mentor Faruque Ahmed (R) talks with skipper Nasir Hossain, who will look to continue the success he has had with the ball and as captain during the Sylhet leg when they take on the Dhaka Dynamites today.

PHOTO: STAR

Anderson promoted

AFP, Adelaide

England's record bowler James Anderson was named as vice-captain for the Ashes series against Australia on Friday, replacing Ben Stokes who is suspended and under investigation over a nightclub brawl.

Anderson, 35, who has 506 Test wickets, was promoted as understudy to captain Joe Root ahead of fellow paceman Stuart Broad and ex-skipper Alastair Cook.

Coach Trevor Bayliss previously said he was planning for an Ashes series without Stokes, who is running out of time ahead of the first Test in Brisbane from November 23.

Stokes remains at home awaiting the outcome of a police probe into his involvement in the brawl outside a Bristol nightclub on September 25.

Lancashire bowling great Anderson is embarking on his fourth Test tour of Australia, and he looks likely to play a key role as England's bowlers hit injury problems.

Nottinghamshire speedster Jake Ball is to have a scan after he injured his right ankle on Thursday during England's warm-up game against a Cricket Australia XI in Adelaide.

Pandya rested for SL Tests

AFP, New Delhi



India's rising star Hardik Pandya on Friday pulled out of a Test series against Sri Lanka with the cricket board saying the all-rounder needs a break.

The 24-year-old is to head for rehabilitation instead of being part of the 16-man squad for the first two of the three-match series which starts next Thursday in Kolkata.

"Considering Mr Pandya's heavy recent workload, the decision was made to negate any possibility of a major injury concern," said a Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) statement.

Pandya is to "undergo a period of strength condi-

tioning at the National Cricket Academy in Bengaluru." Pandya has become a key member of the Virat Kohli-led side since making his limited-overs debut last year. He has played in 30 of India's last 33 matches.



India clinched the T20s 2-1 to stay unbeaten at home in any format since losing to South Africa in one-day games in 2015.

Once shunned by selectors because of his exuberant onfield celebrations and swagger off the pitch, Pandya is now being considered a possible all-time great.

The right-arm medium pace bowler injured his hand trying to stop a shot from New Zealand batsman Colin de Grandhomme in the series-deciding Twenty20 international in Thiruvananthapuram on Tuesday.

Hazlewood ready to roll

AFP, Sydney



Australia paceman Josh Hazlewood said Friday he is ready to let rip in the Ashes Test series opener with England despite having just one first-class match as preparation.

Hazlewood heads into the first Brisbane Test on November 23 on the back of a solitary Sheffield Shield match for New South Wales.

But the quick looks in good nick after taking match figures of six for 73 against Western Australia from a total of 33 overs.

Hazlewood will finalise his Test preparations by working out alongside fast bowlers Mitchell Starc, Pat Cummins and Jackson Bird in Brisbane ahead of the Ashes opener.

"Things went pretty well the whole game," Hazlewood

told reporters.

"From ball one I was pretty surprised with how well the ball was coming out, how good the run-up felt, how good everything (was) in general.

"I'm pretty happy with where it's at now so I don't think there's a need to play another game.

"I'm ready to go now and we obviously talk with the coaches and selectors and physios, everyone is on the same page and ready to go."

Hazlewood, Starc and Cummins bowled to Australia's two top batsmen, skipper Steve Smith and David Warner, in the Sydney Cricket Ground nets in a session full of intensity on Friday.

Things got testy with left-armer Starc forcing Smith to duck for cover several times.

"It's always good fun and they (Smith and Starc) are two world-class players, so it always keeps you on your toes and makes sure you get everything out of the session," Hazlewood said.

PIRGANJ GOLD CUP Ranishankoil start strong

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

Ranishankoil Kheloyar Kolyan Samity got a brilliant start to their Pircganj Gold Cup campaign by beating Gaibandha 6-5 in penalty shootouts at the Pircganj Public Club ground yesterday.

After regulation time produced a 1-1 draw, the match directly rolled into penalties in order to ascertain the victor.

A total of eight teams from Rangpur Division are taking part in this competition.

'Keep politics and sport separate'

IANS, Lahore



Former Pakistan skipper Wasim Akram on Friday hit out at the International Cricket Council's (ICC) inability to pursue the BCCI to play a bilateral series with Pakistan.

Akram, popularly known as the Sultan of Swing, said it is very unfortunate that young cricketers from Pakistan and India are unable to play against each other.

The 51-year-old lashed out at the ICC for failing to initiate an India-Pakistan series which he felt should be separated from politics.

"I don't think ICC has the power to pursue BCCI, but again I have always said people-to-people contact is necessary. Politics and sport should be kept separate," Akram was quoted as saying by Geo TV.

The legendary left-arm pacer further said that an India-Pakistan clash is more exciting to watch than the high-octane Ashes series between traditional rivals England and Australia.

"A Pakistan-India match is more fun to watch than the Ashes. Twenty million people watch the Ashes while a Pakistan-India match is watched by a billion people," emphasised Akram, who took 502 wickets from 356 ODIs.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), in 2014, had agreed to play six bilateral series with Pakistan from 2015 to 2023, four of which were to be hosted by the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB).

However, with political tensions across the border, the BCCI has refused to play any of the agreed series yet, neither in Pakistan nor at any neutral venue.

The arch-rivals, however, met in ICC tournaments with the Champions Trophy final in June being the latest when the Sarfraz Ahmed-led Green Brigade thrashed Virat Kohli's side by 180 runs in London.



WASIM AKRAM