

Big changes in the offing

MAZHAR UDDIN

Cricket
The Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) is in full swing but two off-field issues have taken some sheen off the 'cricketainment'. The final outcome after head coach Chandika Hathurusingha's resignation has been the primary source of speculation in recent times, and to that has been added the discussion over whether the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB)'s decision of allowing a maximum of two NOCs (no-objection certificates) per year to contracted players for overseas competitions is a wise one or not.

Apparently the BCB is all set to move forward with the new plan, although they will make a last-ditch effort when Hathurusingha visits from Sri Lanka within the next few days primarily to complete all the official formalities to clear his path to becoming the new coach of Sri Lanka.

Time will only tell whether the 49-year-old will make a U-turn to comply with the BCB's request of serving at least for the next home series against Sri Lanka in January next year, but the board is going to receive a comprehensive report from the Sri Lankan regarding the South Africa debacle, the reason behind his resignation and some recommendations about what the board needs to do on the domestic front.

There is a good chance that BCB will take some bold actions in line with his report and a close source informed that Mushfiqur Rahim may not be Test captain from the next home series against Sri Lanka and there is a good chance that current T20I skipper Shakib Al Hasan will become Test captain. It is not unlikely that the announcement regarding stepping down from the Test captaincy will

come from Mushfiqur himself.

Although the BCB was sympathetic to Hathurusingha's emotional decision, they were not interested in showing any mercy to Mushfiqur following his media outburst during the South Africa tour.

The immediate issue the board must solve, however, is recruiting a local coach if Hathurusingha sticks to his decision. There are many names of probably local candidates already doing the rounds. Bangladesh ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza stressed on a need for a quick adjustment.

"It's not clear whether there will be a local coach or not. So far Hathurusingha's departure is not confirmed and he is expected to come to Bangladesh. If he stays on after the meeting... Alhamdulilah; and if not the BCB will take the decision," said Mashrafe while talking to reporters yesterday in an anti-drug campaign programme.

"When there is a change you have to accept it as fast as possible. Of course, having played under Hathurusingha for the last three years we know his plans by heart. At the same time, if he does not stay it will be our duty, and also the duty of the new coach to adjust as quickly as possible. If you look at the World Cup, it's not far away, plus there are a lot of overseas tours in 2018. They will also be very important for us. There will be a mental change, but it's not that the effect will be negative; we have to adjust to it as fast as possible," he added.

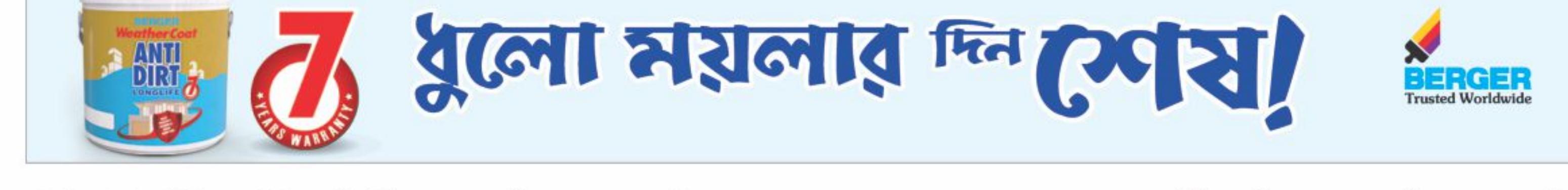
Mashrafe talked about Sarwar Imran and Khaled Mahmud's previous experiences with the national side as coach; the latter has a bright chance of getting the job but the question will be whether the former national captain-turned BCB director will get it for the long term as per his desire, or a makeshift role.

Mushfiqur Rahim (R) speaks to his former BKSP coach and mentor Nazmul Abedin Fahim during a BPL training session at the BCB Academy ground yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR



Rangpur Riders skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (R) shares a light moment with teammate Brendon McCullum (2nd from R) and coach Tom Moody (2nd from L) while Rajshahi Kings pacer Mustafizur Rahman joins them during a rain-marred BPL training session at the BCB Academy yesterday.



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'NOC limitations not a big deal'

SPORTS REPORTER

ODI skipper and Bangladesh cricket's senior statesman Mashrafe Bin Mortaza seemed unperturbed by the Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB's) new policy to grant contracted players a maximum of two No Objection Certificates (NOCs) per year to play in foreign leagues, saying that the restriction was not a big deal as not many Bangladesh players play in more than two foreign competitions anyway.

"First of all, for the players playing for Bangladesh it is their dream to represent the country," Mashrafe told media while attending an anti-narcotics programme at the city's Prottoy Medical Hospital. "I don't think there is a big issue regarding this. Also, how many players play in foreign leagues? Shakib [Al Hasan] and Mustafizur [Rahman] play in the IPL [Indian Premier League]. Apart from the IPL, Shakib perhaps plays in one more league."

Shakib may be the only one among the current crop who will be adversely affected by this new policy as, contrary to what Mashrafe said, he has

three regular ports of call in foreign leagues every year -- the IPL, the Caribbean Premier League and the Pakistani Super League. Mashrafe seemed to slightly revise his stance of the limitation not being a big deal when reminded that it was only Bangladesh players who have been thus restricted.

"At this point all the cricketers are involved with their respective [Bangladesh Premier League] franchises, so I have not been able to talk to them," said Mashrafe when asked if the other players were dissatisfied about the development. "There is a chance to discuss this; maybe the players will understand more about it when they talk to the BCB. I had heard some time ago that this rule would be adopted internationally, but since it is only being applied to us, there is room for discussion on the matter."

'FIVE-FOREIGNER RULE REDUCES OUR CHANCES'

Bangladesh are hosting a T20 franchise of their own as the BPL has the country's cricket fans glued to their television sets. Unlike previous years however, the local batsmen have been relegated to the background as the foreign players have held sway so far. While three of the top five run-scorers

were Bangladeshi in the 2016 edition, none have made it to the top five so far this year and there has only been one fifty -- by Mominul Haque -- from a Bangladeshi batsman so far.

Mashrafe attributed the lack of runs from the locals to the decision to go back to the five-foreigners-per-team rule that was decreased to four after the first season and stuck with over the last three editions.

"In most teams the foreign players are batting in the top order," said the Rangpur Riders skipper. "There are many who are not getting the opportunity to bat. When they do get the chance they don't get the opportunity to build their innings; they have to start playing shots from the word go. These things matter a lot."

"On the other hand, if you see the innings [Dhaka Dynamites batsman] Jahurul [Islam] played [against Khulna Titans on Tuesday], he was the hero in the end. Zia [ur Rahman] has also played some good innings and Abu Jayed has bowled well. The five foreigners-per-side rule has reduced opportunities for the local players because every team wants to use their overseas players."

Ind-SL first Test starts today

AFP, Kolkata

India want underdogs Sri Lanka to force them into an "uncomfortable" zone in their latest Test series starting Thursday, captain Virat Kohli said.

Kohli said his world number one Test side have to use the series to toughen up ahead of their visit to South Africa in January and England later in 2018.

"If you can embrace playing in difficult conditions that will be the difference," Kohli told reporters.

"We want to be uncomfortable, we want to embrace being uncomfortable and that's the most important thing."

"We want to build our games in such a way that we want to look forward to playing anywhere in the world."

India are unbeaten in a home series in any format since being defeated by South Africa in a one-day challenge in 2015.

Sri Lanka are yet to win a Test on Indian soil, but they head for the opener in Kolkata with renewed hopes after winning two Tests against Pakistan in the United Arab Emirates last month.

Sri Lanka do not have happy memories from their last encounter against the Indians.

Sri Lanka skipper Dinesh Chandimal confirmed that veteran Angelo Mathews will bat at the key number four position, but will not bowl as he recovers from injury.

'Cricket passion is in my blood'

Fast bowler Liam Plunkett has established himself in the England limited-overs side in the past two-three years with some fine performances. The 32-year-old will complete a decade in international cricket this month and has had a lot of ups and downs in his career, but he still managed to make a strong comeback. The cricketer, who was rejuvenated by a move to Jason Gillespie-coached Yorkshire, is playing for Sylhet Sixers in the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League and spoke about his career, missing out on the Ashes and a few other topics in an exclusive interview with The Daily Star's Mazhar Uddin. The following are excerpts:

The Daily Star (TDS): How is your experience so far in the BPL?



Liam Plunkett (LP): We started in Sylhet and the team won the first three games. The crowds were amazing in Sylhet, obviously as it was the first time that they have had matches there. Great experience, but last two games I missed out for injury which was disappointing; hopefully I am fit to play tomorrow [Wednesday]. I have been to Bangladesh maybe four or five times before for international duties.

TDS: How challenging is it for a fast bowler to perform in the subcontinent?

LP: I think no one around the world now can just come up and bowl seam here; it has to be cutters and variations. As an international player and as a good player you have to play well in every continent, you have to adapt and look at the local bowlers -- how they bowl and maybe take some advice from them. It's tough, but you have to play in tough conditions against tough people where the weather is going to be warmer, more humid, more sweaty... so it's good to be part of the squad; it's fun.

TDS: You will complete a decade in international cricket having made your Test debut back in 2005 against India at Lord's. Tell us about your journey for England so far?

LP: It's good. Obviously I was in an out before but for the past three years I feel like I have got some cricket demons; my move to Yorkshire helped me rediscover myself and here I am right now.

TDS: How much does an Ashes series mean for an English cricketer?

LP: Every time you play for England, it's massive. The rivalry between England and Australia is massive, so the

England guys will now be looking forward to that. The battle will commence soon.

TDS: Did you hope to get a recall in the upcoming Ashes series after your tremendous performance in the limited-overs recently?

LP: Sometimes, maybe yeah, but whatever happens it happens and I am here. My mind is focused on BPL for the Sylhet Sixers. So I am looking to win for them, help the team and help the guys win.

TDS: How was the experience during last year's series against Bangladesh here?

LP: A lot hotter... last year was really warm so I was expecting that this time but it's nice and cool. The conditions are nicer for English people and what was really good was that we managed to win the one-day series last time. Obviously we have seen some good and hard cricket with some good bowlers in the Bangladesh team.

TDS: What suggestions would you give Bangladeshi fast bowlers to exploit conditions and pitches in seaming conditions abroad?

LP: Young kids have got good seam naturally because you have to hit the seam here to do anything. So when you go to England it's just about making sure that you pitch the ball full and you get some swing and nip. It will be more movement than here as the people in England bowl straighter on good lengths to get wickets.

U-19s face Pakistan in semis today

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh youths will take on their Pakistan counterparts in the first semifinal of the Under-19 Asia Cup today. The 50-over contest will start at the Kinrava Academy Oval in the Malaysian capital of Kuala Lumpur at 9.30am.

Yet to win major silverware at the age-group level, Bangladesh are in a strong position to make it into the final after their impressive win against defending champions India. They actually thrashed their Indian counterparts in their last group league game by eight wickets and with plenty of overs to spare.

Bangladesh made the semifinal in Under-19 World Cup on their home soil in 2016. And although the youth team had a disappointing home series against Afghanistan ahead of the tournament, which is actually a build-up for next year's youth World Cup in New Zealand, they made a remarkable turnaround in the championship so far.

They pulled off a thrilling win against Nepal in their opening game and also thrashed hosts Malaysia in a game where Towhid Ridoy scored a century. On-song Ridoy scored an enterprising 48 against India.

Afghanistan will take on Nepal in the second semifinal at the same venue tomorrow.

Depression hits cricket fans

SPORTS REPORTER

Inclement weather played a part for the first time in the ongoing Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) yesterday when both the games were washed out without a ball being bowled at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

The overcast conditions accompanied by light drizzle throughout the day, a contributing effect of a low over the Bay, meant that the four teams -- Khulna Titans, Sylhet Sixers, Dhaka Dynamites and Chittagong Vikings -- evenly shared one point each much to the disappointment of the country's cricket followers.

The first game between Khulna and Sylhet was called off twenty minutes before the cut-off time. The second game turned out to be a big disappointment for leaders Dhaka as they were looking forward to smooth sailing against Chittagong, who are languishing at the bottom of the seven-team table with one win from five games.

With the damp weather dictating terms at Mirpur, the players turned to indoor activities. The players of Khulna Titans enjoyed a fun game with a football inside the dressing room while a few Dhaka Dynamites players, including skipper Shakib Al Hasan, had a serious session at the indoor facilities adjacent to the venue. Bangladesh's inspirational one-day captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, who is leading Rangpur Riders in the BPL, was engaged in an animated adda, he is famous for.

Although the country has experienced an extended rainy season this year, November leading up to February is considered the best time for uninterrupted cricket under glorious sunshine. The depression, which is at the moment moving along the south coast of India, might not be as powerful as to lash Bangladesh over the next couple of days. But Dhaka might experience another damp day. However if the rain stays away, which is a possibility, the BPL can have a field day with another double-header at the home of cricket in Mirpur billed for today. Rajshahi Kings are scheduled to take on Sylhet Sixers in the first match while Khulna will face Chittagong in the second fixture under lights.

POINTS TABLE

Team	M	W	L	N/R	Pts	NRR
Dhaka Dynamites	5	3	1	1	7	1.971
Sylhet Sixers	6	3	2	1	7	-0.610
Comilla Victorians	4	3	1	0	6	0.942
Khulna Titans	5	2	2	1	5	-0.387
Chittagong Vikings	5	1	3	1	3	-0.566
Rangpur Riders	3	1	2	0	2	-0.536
Rajshahi Kings	4	1	3	0	2	-0.745