



Rashid Khan was once again the irresistible force as Afghanistan clinched the three-match T20I series against Bangladesh with a six-wicket win in the second T20I at the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium in Dehradun yesterday.

PHOTO: BCB

## 'We're the best in the world'

MAZHAR UDDIN from Dehradun



After beating Bangladesh by six wickets to clinch the three-match T20I series 2-0 at the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium in Dehradun yesterday, Afghanistan's middle-order batsman Shafiqullah was beaming with confidence during the post-match press conference and stated that they were the best T20I side in the world.

And why not -- it was their fourth T20I bilateral series win against a Test playing nation, and that too with a match to spare, and what Shafiqullah said after the game sent a strong message to the cricketing world.

"You know, we are the best T20 side in the world at the moment and we can beat any side in the world. We are looking for a clean sweep in the series and looking forward to our maiden Test against India," said an excited Shafiqullah.

The air was much bleaker when the Bangladesh representative spoke at the press conference. Left-arm seamer Abu Hider said that it was a single over in each innings -- the 16th over of Bangladesh's innings from Afghanistan leg-spinner Rashid Khan that yielded three wickets and then the 19th over of Afghanistan's chase when Rubel Hossain was hammered for the 20 runs required to

win the match by Mohammad Nabi -- that made the difference.

"We knew that the series would be difficult for us, and it can happen in cricket. We are not worried as we know our strengths and will work on our mistakes. Unfortunately, it was difficult for the new batsmen after we lost two [three] wickets in the same over from Rashid and I think it was a vital moment in the game," said Hider, who struck a quickfire 21 off 14 balls to help the Tigers post 134 for eight after they were struggling at 108 for eight in 18 overs.

There had been a lot of talk about the threat from Rashid and when asked whether that had an impact, Hider said that it was a case of not being able to execute their plans against the world's top-ranked T20I bowler.

"We were unable to execute our plans against him but it's not like we were scared of him. Our plan was to take singles off Rashid and look to score off other bowlers."

### SCORES IN BRIEF

**Bangladesh:** 134 for 8 in 20 overs (Tamim 43, Sabbir 13, Mushfiqur 22, Mahmudullah 14, Hider 21 not out; Nabi 2-19, Rashid 4-12)  
**Afghanistan:** 135 for 4 in 18.5 overs (Shahzad 24, Usman 21, Samiullah 49, Nabi 31 not out; Rubel 1-38, Hider 1-14, Mosaddek 2-21)  
**Result:** Afghanistan won by 6 wickets and lead the 3-match series 2-0.

## Rhodes to take Tigers' reins?

SPORTS REPORTER

The post of the Bangladesh national team's head coach, which has been vacant for the last seven months since the resignation of Chandika Hathurusinghalast October, is set to be filled this month by an Englishman named Steve Rhodes who played 11 Tests and nine ODIs in the late '80s and 90s.

Official confirmation of the impending appointment was yet to come from the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), but according to sources an unofficial deal is all but completed with the former England wicketkeeper, who is expected to arrive in the capital next Thursday to ink the deal for two-and-a-half years.

Since Hathurusingha's departure, the BCB interviewed Richard Pybus, Phil Simmons and also contacted a number of big names like Tom Moody, Mahelajayawardene, Kumar Sangakkara, Andy Flower, Justin Langer, Geoff Marsh and Paul Farbrace. However, the response



STEVE RHODES

was poor as after the advent of franchise-based cricket, not many are interested to take up the long-term assignment of coaching a national team.

They had also struck a short-term deal with former South Africa opener Gary Kirsten to help in the search, which is finally set to end with the appointment of the 53-year-old Rhodes, who was the director of cricket for Worcestershire but left his post following an internal investigation in November last year. It was reported that he delayed telling the county about the

arrest of all-rounder Alex Hepburn, who was charged with two counts of rape.

"Steve Rhodes is in our shortlist. We will conduct a meeting with him in the same way we did with Richard Pybus and Phil Simmons," BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury told reporters yesterday in Mirpur. "We gave the list we had to Kirsten and he has been working on it. It can be said that it is a joint effort. He [Rhodes] is one of the experienced coaches among the ones who are currently available. Basically, we are giving priority to experience. As you know, the next World Cup will be held in England which is also an important factor here. If we can include someone who knows their conditions well then we can gain some extra benefits."

Rhodes, who was also part of the England coaching staff during their Test series in Bangladesh in 2016, told ESPNcricinfo: "I can confirm I've had talks with Bangladesh. And I can confirm I'm interested in what I think is a really prestigious role. But nothing is confirmed at this stage and nobody should jump the gun and presume it is."



PHOTO: AFP

French President Emmanuel Macron (C) poses for a photo with France's national football team players and officials yesterday in Clairefontaine-en-Yvelines, where the Les Bleus are training for the upcoming World Cup in Russia.



## Fans can fly foreign flags

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court (HC) yesterday gave the go-ahead to hoist foreign national flags across the country during the upcoming FIFA World Cup.

The court rejected a writ petition, lodged on May 27 by freedom fighter Mohammad Nurul Amin, which brought into question the legality of flying different international flags not just at any time but during the World Cup in particular.

Justices Nazrul Islam Talukder and Shahidul Karim presided over the case and discarded the petition on the grounds that it was not properly moved before the court.

Nurul submitted the petition to the HC on June 4 seeking a directive from the government to stop people from hoisting foreign national flags.

The petition said that supporters of different countries, which are participating in the FIFA World Cup which commences on June 14 in Russia, hoisted the flags of those countries during previous editions of the tournament in violation of the law.

As per the Bangladesh Flag Rules in 1972, no foreign flags can be flown without specific permission from the government, with the exception being foreign diplomatic offices, Nurul cited in the petition.

Earlier on May 28, another HC bench of Justices Naima Haider and Zafar Ahmed refused to even hold a hearing on the legislation.

The bench had also dropped the petition from its hearing list, Assistant Attorney General Saifur Rahman informed.

## Abahani blow title race wide open

SPORTS REPORTER



The race for the Green Delta Insurance Premier Division Hockey League title was blown wide open as Abahani defeated Dhaka Mariner Young's Club 2-1 in their final Super Five match at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Earlier, fellow title contenders Mohammedan Sporting Club returned to winning ways with an emphatic 6-0 win over Sonali Bank at the same venue.

With their fourth straight win in as many Super Five matches, Abahani joined the Black and Whites on top of the table on 39 points each. However, Mohammedan will play their final match of the league on Thursday against Mariner Young's, who currently have 36 points from 14 matches.

Thursday's Super Five encounter between Mohammedan and Mariner Young's has virtually turned into the title-

deciding match as the Motijheel-based outfit will regain the trophy for the first time in six years if they can secure just a single point. On the other hand, Mariner Young's can spoil the party if they notch a straight victory and push the league into a play-off competition among the top three teams -- Abahani, Mohammedan and Mariner Young's -- to decide the winner.

Although Abahani came into the match 22 hours after beating Mohammedan 3-2, the defending champions failed to capitalise on the Sky Blue's lack of energy.

Farhad Ahmed Shitul gave Mariner Young's the lead in the 33rd minute by scoring from a penalty corner set-piece. However, Roman Sarker levelled the margin 11 minutes later with a brilliant shot.

Ashrafur Islam then scored the winner by converting a penalty stroke in the 51st minute.

In the day's first match, Mohammedan suffocated Sonali Bank as captain Rasel Mahmud Jimmy slotted a hat-trick while Gurjinder Singh added two and Rabbi Salehin scored one.



PHOTO: STAR

Abahani players celebrate their come-from-behind 2-1 win against holders Mariner Young's to leave the Premier Hockey League title race wide open yesterday.

## Tough test for Tigresses

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's cricket team will face their biggest challenge in their T20 Asia Cup campaign when they meet pre-tournament favourites India at the Kinrara Academy Oval in Kuala Lumpur today.

After a humiliating defeat in the opening match against Sri Lanka, Bangladesh bounced back strongly to pull off their maiden T20 victory over Pakistan but the third match against India will be a tough one. India have not only topped the table in the tournament but are also favourites to become champions for the seventh successive occasion.

The Salma Khatun-led side will play their remaining games against Thailand tomorrow and against Malaysia on June 9.

## WI-SL first Test starts today

AFP, Port of Spain

West Indies and Sri Lanka commence one of the most infrequent of international cricket assignments when the first match of a three-Test series begins on Wednesday at the Queen's Park Oval in Trinidad.

More than 36 years since being granted Test status, this is just Sri Lanka's fourth Test tour of the Caribbean and the first involving more than two matches.

## Novak stunned by Cecchinato

AFP, Paris



World number 72 Marco Cecchinato stunned Novak Djokovic in a French Open classic on Tuesday to set up a semifinal clash against Dominic Thiem, with Sloane Stephens and Madison Keys to meet in the women's last four.

Cecchinato is the first Italian man to reach a Grand Slam semifinal since 1978 after his thrilling 6-3, 7-6 (7/4), 1-6, 7-6 (13/11) victory over the 12-time major champion.

The 25-year-old, who had never won a Grand Slam match in his career before Roland Garros, goes on to face Austrian seventh seed Thiem for a place in Sunday's final.

In an epic fourth-set tie-break, Djokovic saved three match points but wasted three set points as Cecchinato became the lowest-ranked man to make the last four in Paris since 100th-ranked Andrei Medvedev in 1999.

Djokovic had also squandered three set points in the second set and failed to serve out the fourth in the ninth game after being 5-2 in front.



In an extraordinary post-match press conference, Djokovic then said he may even skip Wimbledon where he has been champion three times.

"I don't know if I am going to play on grass," said the Serb. "I'm just not thinking about tennis at the moment."

Cecchinato struggled to comprehend his triumph, coming just two years after his career was almost derailed when he became embroiled in match-fixing allegations.

"Maybe I'm sleeping. It's amazing, it's unbelievable for me. I'm very happy because it's unbelievable to beat Novak Djokovic in a quarter-final at Roland Garros. It's amazing," he said.

Thiem reached his third successive French Open semi-final with a 6-4, 6-2, 6-1 demolition of a hobbled and exhausted Alexander Zverev who admitted he was close to quitting the tie.

In the women's draw, US Open champion Stephens brushed aside Russian Daria Kasatkina to set up a repeat of last year's Flushing Meadows final with fellow American and good friend Keys.