

# SPORT



## Tigers seek happy ending in Sylhet

SPORTS REPORTER

Shai Hope's brilliance has shifted all cricketing focus from the hustle and bustle of Dhaka to the relative peace and quiet of Sylhet, where the three-match ODI series between Bangladesh and West Indies will be decided in the final game tomorrow.

West Indies opener Hope hit a sublime 146 to single-handedly take West Indies across the finish line in the second game on Tuesday, reviving the tourists' flagging spirits in a tour that has seen them beaten handily in every match up to that point.

While Bangladesh would ideally have wanted to come to Sylhet with the series in the bag and eyeing their second successive home whitewash after blanking Zimbabwe in October, there is reason enough to be upbeat ahead of the last game. Their superiority over the opposition can still be said to be intact as, apart from Hope, none of the rest of the West Indies batting lineup registered substantial scores.

The teams reached Sylhet in the evening yesterday and spent the rest of the day relaxing in their rooms and the hosts are expected to have a practice session in the evening today, which will end under the lights of the picturesque Sylhet International Stadium.

Other than winning the series Bangladesh will have another score to settle at the venue -- having lost its inaugural Test last month against Zimbabwe, the Tigers would love to win the venue's first ODI and mark a happy end to a good year in ODIs.



Particularly our fast bowlers need to improve a bit as we were unable to bowl well in the slog overs in the last few games. So I think if we are able to improve those areas it will be good for us. Obviously our batters are doing well and we need to continue that. But I think we are still in the series and the last game is a do-or-die for us and we have always done well in such situations in the past.

MEHEDI HASAN MIRAZ  
BANGLADESH ALL-ROUNDER



Bangladesh batsman Mahmudullah Riyad exits the Osmani International Airport in Sylhet on way to boarding the team bus yesterday. The Tigers will play the third and final ODI against West Indies on Friday.

PHOTO: STAR

## EMERGING ASIA CUP BD face SL in semis today

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Under-23 team will lock horns against their Sri Lankan counterparts in the semifinal of the ACC Emerging Teams Asia Cup at the R Premadasa Stadium in Sri Lanka today.

Batting was an area of concern for Bangladesh at the start of the tournament as they were on the receiving end of a humiliating 97-run defeat against UAE in their opening match. The Tigers were bundled out for 170 in that game.

However, Bangladesh displayed a better batting performance in their next game against Hong Kong, posting 286 for eight wickets in 50 overs, and eventually won the match by 28 runs.

The gradual batting improvement continued for the Tigers as they convincingly defeated Pakistan by an 84-run margin in a must-win game after putting on a mammoth 309-run total.

Bangladesh will have to emulate their performances from the previous two matches today if they are to secure a spot in the final, scheduled to be held on December 15 at the same venue.

## Does Imrul fit in a full-strength team?

SAKEB SUBHAN from Sylhet

There was not much to be hypercritical about after Bangladesh's last-over loss in the second ODI against the West Indies in Mirpur on Tuesday. A few fielding errors under pressure aside, there was little to do when a batsman plays perhaps the innings of his career so far as a flawless Shai Hope did that night. But the aftermath of a narrow loss may be the time to look at where the team can improve with the World Cup less than six months away.

The series started with the sweet headache of having four in-form openers to choose from after Tamim Iqbal's return from injury and Imrul Kayes, Liton Das and Soumya Sarkar all striking form variously in warm-up matches, the ODI series against Zimbabwe and the Asia Cup in September.

That led to the situation of Bangladesh playing all four openers against West Indies so far, leaving out Mohammad Mithun from the side that played the third ODI against Zimbabwe. The experiment has so far not borne fruit as the usual suspects -- Mushfiqur



Imruls Kayes failed with the bat in both the ODIs against the West Indies and is in danger of losing his place in the Bangladesh team. PHOTO: STAR FILE

Rahim and Shakib Al Hasan in the first match and Mushfiqur, Shakib and Tamim in the second -- did the bulk of the scoring.

While Liton scored 41 and Soumya hit a fit-for-purpose 12-ball 19 at the fag end in chase of a sub-par total in the first match, Imrul has failed in both games. The manner of his dismissals, beaten by the raw pace of Oshane Thomas for four and zero after coming in at number three and lasting a total of eight balls across

both innings, is what should concern the selectors and team management. With a maximum of nine games to go before the World Cup in the seam-friendly conditions of England, the question of whether Imrul fits into that particular equation has to be asked now.

Imrul was beaten by pace twice on a slow Mirpur wicket, which does not augur well for his prospects in England where Bangladesh start their campaign against the likes of Kagiso Rabada

and Dale Steyn.

This is of course not to say that Imrul does not have value to offer. He stepped in manfully in Tamim's absence and compiled the most runs in a three-ODI series for Bangladesh as recently as October, during the three-ODI series against Zimbabwe when he struck two centuries. But with Mashrafe sounding a ruthless note after the first ODI about the focus being on finalising the best combination for the global showpiece, a shaky top order has to be solidified.

He also said that the top three will consist of three of the four openers now playing, and as far as playing a new white ball goes, Soumya and Liton look better bets because they do not seem to be hounded by high pace. If it seems harsh on Imrul that his place is under the scanner so soon after a purple patch, one may consider the plight of Karun Nair, who was dropped by India three Tests after becoming the second Indian to score a Test triple hundred. Assuming that Bangladesh want to emulate that ruthless drive for excellence that has taken India to the top, the team management will have to start deciding on whether this is in fact their best eleven.

## Who comes after Big Five?

MAZHAR UDDIN

On Tuesday the cricketing fraternity of the country celebrated the 100th international game being played together by the Big Five -- Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Shakib Al Hasan, Tamim Iqbal, Mahmudullah Riyad and Mushfiqur Rahim.

However, they were unable to make the second game against the West Indies a memorable occasion, losing by four wickets after Shai Hope's career-best unbeaten 146 saw the visitors level the series at one apiece.

Interestingly, it was yet again players within that quintet who stepped up. Shakib, Mushfiqur and Tamim struck fifties while none of the others managed to step up either with ball or bat, laying bare the over-dependency on the seniors that has been a common feature for the past few years of Bangladesh cricket.

It has to be mentioned that among those five, ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza is nearing the end of a 17-year career, with next year's World Cup in England set to be his last.

The other four have also reached a certain stage in their careers where they are perhaps thinking about when to stop after having completed more than a decade in international cricket -- although they are likely to stick around until the conclusion of the 2023 World Cup.

One should also mention the contributions from the existing core group that have managed to overcome numerous hurdles both as individuals and as a team to take Bangladesh cricket to a certain level.

So the biggest question that remains is who will fill the abyss in the core group for the Tigers in the future after these cricketers depart.

There have been quite a few who have been and are still being given opportunities to prepare themselves for the future in the like of Soumya Sarkar, Liton Das, Mehedi



(L-R) BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury, Bangladesh all-rounder Mehedi Hasan Miraz and UNICEF country representative Edouard Beigbeder show the national team shirt with the UNICEF logo after signing a two-year agreement in Mirpur yesterday.

## U-15s hold Thailand

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh under-15 football team forced a 1-1 draw against Thailand in their second match of the U-15 International Men's Football Tournament at the Buriram United Stadium in Thailand yesterday.

Bouncing back from a 4-0 defeat against Cyprus in their first match, the charges of Anwar Parvez gave a good account of themselves as they fought toe-to-toe against the hosts in front of a few hundred local spectators in their second match of the competition, which is funded by UEFA.

Bangladesh took the lead in the 34th minute when Ashikur Rahman shrugged off his marker and headed the ball home into the near post on a looping ball from a teammate.

The lead, though, lasted only 11 minutes as Thai forward Chonnapat Buaphan's glancing header on a corner nestled into the far corner of the net, with the Bangladesh goalkeeper standing at the near post.

The hosts applied heavy pressure in the last 15 minutes but failed to find the winning goal as Bangladesh held on to a creditable draw.

Bangladesh will take on their South Asian counterparts Maldives in their last match tomorrow.

## Sunzamul rocks East

SPORTS REPORTER

North Zone's Sunzamul Islam bagged a fiver, scalping four wickets on the second day of their Bangladesh Cricket League fourth round encounter against East Zone yesterday at the Shahid Kamruzzaman Stadium in Rajshahi.

Sunzamul, who took the important wicket of Mohammad Ashraful after the former Bangladesh skipper had scored a 251-ball 136, ended with a figure of five for 115 runs.

East's overnight batsmen -- Rony



SUNZAMUL... 5 for 115

Talukdar and Ashraful -- started the day on the back of their magnificent 241-run fourth-wicket partnership but unfortunately the pair could only add three more to the total as Rony fell prey to Ebadat Hossain early in the day. Rony, who authored a sublime 245-ball 185, missed out on the opportunity to score a double-ton as he could only notch 2 runs yesterday.

It was all downhill for East after that. They survived only the first session of the day, stretching their first innings total to 466

runs before being bundled out.

In reply, North ended the day on a high note after managing a score of 178 for two at close. The two openers Junaid Siddique and Jahurul Islam scored 51 and 65 runs respectively.

In the other match between Central Zone and South Zone at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram, Central's struggles continued as they added 27 runs to their overnight score and ended their first innings with 261 runs on the board after having played 97.4 overs.

Coming in to bat, South experienced an early jolt as they lost opener Shahriar Nafees in the third over with just six runs on the board. However, a 146-run partnership between Fazole Mahmud and Anamul Haque steadied the ship before Fazole was trapped in front of an Arafat Sunny delivery after scoring 74 runs off 99 deliveries. Anamul, who scored 77 runs off 118 balls, was the next one to fall.

South ended the day on 309 for five in 82.1 overs and lead by 48 runs with five wickets remaining in the innings. Raqibul Hasan remained unbeaten on 54 runs.

### SCORES IN BRIEF

**CENTRAL ZONE V SOUTH ZONE**  
CENTRAL ZONE: First innings 261 all out (Shadman 60, Marshall 44, Shuvagata 27, Taibur 68; Al-Amin 3-67, Mahedi 3-50, Razzak 2-80)  
SOUTH ZONE: First innings 309 for 5 (Anamul 77, Fazole 74, Tushar 78, Raqibul 54 not out; Yeasin 2-42, Sunny 3-104)

**EAST ZONE V NORTH ZONE**  
EAST ZONE: First innings 446 all out (Rony 185, Mominul 26, Mahmudul 29, Ashraful 136, Tajjul 37; Ebadat 2-95, Shohag 2-74, Sunzamul 5-115)  
NORTH ZONE: First innings 178 for 2 (Jahurul 65, Junaid 51, Farhad 34 not out; Enamul 1-16)



Hasan Miraz, Mustafizur Rahman, Anamul Haque, Sabbir Rahman, Sohag Gazi, Taskin Ahmed, Mosaddek Hossain and the list goes on and on.

But apart from Mehedi and Mustafizur, none of the others have been able to remain consistent or improved and adapted their game gradually for the international level despite there being no shortage of talent. And it has to be said that all the above cricketers have received enough opportunities. One cannot label them newcomers as they have already been on the scene for the past three-four years.

Some of them may have all the skills and technique, but still require mental strength while some others require proper guidance. Above all, they need to set a benchmark for themselves.

Bangladesh cricket may have been harvesting the fruits from seeds planted well in the past, but it is important to prepare the next core group in order to take the Tigers further, before they face the same consequences of a huge vacuum similar to Sri Lanka after the retirement of Kumar Sangakkara, Mahela Jayawardene and Tillakaratne Dilshan.