

SPORT



'We can go right to the top'

2018 has been a magnificent year in all formats for **Mushfiqur Rahim**. His match-winning contributions have emerged as the highlight of Mushfiqur's performance throughout the year, and he was an obvious choice to be declared *The Daily Star's Sportsman of the Year*. The 31-year-old also became the first wicket-keeper batsman in Test history to score two double-hundreds when he hit a brilliant unbeaten 219 against Zimbabwe. The dependable cricketer spoke to *The Daily Star's Mazhar Uddin* about his performances in 2018 and his plans for the upcoming year. The following are the excerpts of the exclusive interview:

The Daily Star (TDS): You were named *The Daily Star's Sportsman of the Year* for your brilliant batting in 2018. How would you assess the year?

Mushfiqur Rahim (MR): Alhamdulillah, it always feels good but there is no end to doing better. The type of shape I was in over the past two-three years, I think I could have done even better in 2018. But overall, 2018 was not bad. I tried to be consistent but I could have done better. As a team we missed opportunities to win two-three trophies in 2018 - it was a mixed bag but overall I think we had the consistency. It will help us in the coming year, which will be more challenging.

TDS: Which knock in 2018 would you rate as your best?
MR: Test cricket has always remained the top among the three formats, so I think I will keep my unbeaten 219 against Zimbabwe up there. The type of situation we were in after losing three early wickets on an unpredictable Mirpur pitch was tough. I had a good partnership with Mominul Haque and I think credit should also go to him. Along with the skill, I was able to keep the mental discipline during that knock, so I think it was my best knock of 2018.

TDS: 2019 will be challenging for Bangladesh as most of the matches are abroad, including the World Cup in England and Wales. What areas do you think you as an individual and the team can work on?

MR: It's always challenging to bat in New Zealand but there will be sporting pitches in ICC events like the World Cup. The series against New Zealand will be challenging. Although we lost the match, we did pretty well in Wellington last time and have good memories there. They have some skilful bowlers like Trent Boult and Tim Southee and we know where they are going to attack us. I will start working on those areas during the Bangladesh Premier League; it's a different format but it's always good to be in match mode. As a batting unit I think it will be a huge challenge and three-four experienced batters need to step up so that, as our bowling unit is relatively inexperienced, we could provide them enough opportunities. The format in the World Cup this time is very even for everyone as we will get enough opportunities to play and I think it is suitable for us. If we can start the year well in New Zealand, which will be tough but not impossible, we can gather momentum for the World Cup. Our best achievement in was reaching the quarterfinals and I believe we have the ability to go right to



PHOTO: BCB

the top this time.

TDS: Talking about the inexperienced fast bowling attack, what can we learn from India, who have developed a dangerous pace bowling unit both home and abroad?

MR: It's a huge factor and the main thing is to have that hunger. If someone asks me which format I want to play I would say Tests. It's a matter of love and passion -- if our bowlers don't believe that they can take 100 or 200 Test wickets and don't try to be match-winners, it will be tough. You have to dream -- it won't come easily. You have to bowl 25-30 overs in each innings. You need that fitness, mental toughness and also the skill. Your competition has to be with [Jasprit] Bumrah, [Mitchell] Starc and even if you don't have that much pace you can work on your line, length and swing. Look at Mohammad Abbas making life hell for Australia and New Zealand, that too in the UAE. He does

not have enough pace but just focuses on a specific area and bowls continuously with just a little movement.

TDS: Were you disappointed at not being picked for the Indian Premier League?

MR: It was not in my hands. There are many calculations for the franchises as each team can have four foreign players in the playing eleven. I also heard that the BCCI has not allowed replacements for players in World Cup squads. So, even if a player from Bangladesh got a chance, he would have to return midway through the tournament to take part in the tri-series in Ireland. I never had high hopes of the IPL as I have not sent my name that frequently for the auction, but there was an opportunity this time around. As it did not happen, I am not bothered at all. My job is to play well for my country and if I get a call to play somewhere else during the journey that's obviously an honour.

'No compromise till World Cup'

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh ODI skipper **Mashrafe Bin Mortaza** became the first ever active international cricketer to join parliament when he was elected from Narail-2 in the eleventh national election on Sunday.

Mashrafe, who was greeted by garlands from supporters after winning by a landslide, informed that although his new responsibilities will be quite demanding, his dedication to cricket will not be affected.

"I won't compromise anything when it comes to cricket till the World Cup. So I have the same cricketing mentality till then," said the charismatic captain.

Mashrafe has quite a busy schedule ahead as 2019 will begin with him leading defending champions Rangpur Riders in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) set to get underway on January 5. The right-arm pacer, who will return to Dhaka today, said that his focus will now shift to performing well in the BPL.

"The focus will be on that from tomorrow. However, as I always gave my best in my cricketing career, I will also try to replicate it while working here [Narail]."

ODI skipper Mashrafe will then travel to New Zealand for a three-ODI and three-Test series against the hosts in February. The Tigers will then play an ODI tri-series against hosts Ireland and West Indies in May ahead of the World Cup in England from May 30.



MASHRAFE BIN MORTAZA

TALK ON



I want to get a good start in the New Year. As we are going to start 2019 with the BPL, I am only focusing on this tournament. I am not thinking on a national team return; instead I will only try to perform well in BPL. Only performance matters in the end.

NURUL HASAN
BANGLADESH
WICKETKEEPER-BATSMAN

Rumana makes ICC's World XI

SPORTS REPORTER



2018 did not end very well for the Bangladesh women's team following a poor showing at the ICC Women's World T20 in West Indies in November. However, the year will always be remembered as a special one for the Tigresses as their biggest achievement till date came in June when they became the champions of Asia by defeating India by three wickets in the Women's T20 Asia Cup final.

Aside from all other accomplishments, Bangladesh T20 captain Rumana Ahmed has her own special reason to remember the year as she became the first Bangladesh women's team player to be selected for the ICC T20I Team of the Year.

Rumana had an excellent year, especially with the ball as she was in second position in the wicket-takers' list in T20Is, scalping 30 wickets in 24 matches.

The 27-year old was also instrumental in Bangladesh's Asia Cup triumph, finishing as the tournament's second-highest wicket-taker with 10 wickets from six matches.

However, Rumana expressed her disappointment at not being able to carry their Asia Cup form into the T20 World Cup.

"It has been a good year consider-

ing all aspects, both batting and bowling for me, as well as the team. So it feels really good," Rumana said. "Our confidence took a beating as we could not do well in the World Cup but this also acts as a motivation to do better. If we try and work hard, we can do better in 2019."

Rumana also mentioned the need to get more playing time next year.

"There was a huge lacking in our temperament. Actually I don't want to see it as a mistake as it [temperament]

gets better if we play more. We will get more experienced the more we play and the more time we spend on the field."

ICC Women's T20I team of 2018: Smriti Mandhana (India), Alyssa Healy (Australia) (wicketkeeper), Suzie Bates (New Zealand), Harmanpreet Kaur (India) (captain), Natalie Sciver (England), Ellyse Perry (Australia), Ashleigh Gardner (Australia), Leigh Kasperek (New Zealand), Megan Schutt (Australia), Rumana Ahmed (Bangladesh), Poonam Yadav (India)



Bangladesh T20 captain Rumana Ahmed had a year to remember as she led the Tigresses to an Asia Cup triumph which earned her a spot on the ICC T20I Team of the Year.

PHOTO: STAR FILE

Spinners may get a turn to shine at SCG

REUTERS, Melbourne



Overflowing with confidence and buoyed by the blossoming of a rare pace talent, India can sniff a first-ever series win on Australian soil ahead of the fourth and final Test in Sydney.

Led by Jasprit Bumrah's series-leading 20 wickets, India's vaunted pace attack have hogged the spotlight this tour but the slow bowlers may get their turn to shine on the traditionally spin-friendly wicket at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

Leading the series 2-1 after the 137-run thrashing of Tim Paine's depleted Australia in Melbourne on Sunday, Virat Kohli's team are in the box seat to shrug off the nation's history of underachievement Down Under.

The last Indian team to win two Tests in Australia was back in 1977-78 but the Bob Simpson-captained hosts claimed the fifth and final contest to break the hearts of Bishan Bedi's side.

After India outplayed Australia with bat and ball in Melbourne, Kohli is convinced India have the firepower to break new ground.

"It's a great opportunity from the point of view that we always wanted to win a series away from home.

India's sole defeat in the series came without a spinner at Perth, when the team went with four pace bowlers in a much-

criticised selection. Australia spinner Nathan Lyon took a bag of wickets to be named man-of-the-match.

Left-arm spinner Ravindra Jadeja was selected in Melbourne and supported the quicks with five wickets, while Ravichandran Ashwin continued his recovery from an abdominal strain.

Ashwin took six wickets and was instrumental in the series-opening win in Adelaide, so India may be keen to unleash a dual spin bowling attack against Australia's ill-at-ease batsmen.

"It depends on the pitch. I think Ashwin's very close to being match fit," Kohli said. "He's been bowling a lot of overs and I'm sure these next four days will make him even stronger."

"Regardless, being the last test match I think he will be willing to push himself and start for the team but again it depends on what type of pitch we get for Sydney."

Spin bowling all-rounder Hanuma Vihari, promoted from number six after Perth, was less assured in his debut as an opener, scoring eight and 13.

He could make way for fit-again seam-bowling all-rounder Hardik Pandya should selectors opt for two spinners.

Kohli, however, praised Vihari for soaking up 111 deliveries in the Melbourne test and may be reluctant to fiddle too much with a winning combination.

'SL cricket rated most corrupt'

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka has been rated as the most corrupt cricket nation by the world governing body, the country's sports minister said Monday.

The International Cricket Council feels "Sri Lanka's cricket administration is corrupt from top to bottom", Harin Fernando said, adding that he had been shown a confidential report on the matter at a Dubai meeting.

A host of scandals have rocked Sri Lankan cricket in recent years including a match-fixing controversy revealed in a sting operation carried out for a TV documentary.

The ICC anti-corruption unit has regularly investigated cases in the island nation.

The crisis-ridden Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) is to hold delayed elections in February, which were due last May when the term of president Thilanga Sumathipala ended.

Sumathipala has been accused of violating ICC rules by holding office despite alleged links to gambling. He denies the charges.

"Unfortunately Sri Lanka is being ranked as one of the worst or the top worst country for cricket corruption," Fernando told reporters.

"They told me that the problem was not limited to bookies, but even the local game's links with the underworld," he said, adding that the corruption was more to do with cricket administration than players.

Last month former Sri Lankan fast bowler Dilhara Lokuhettige was suspended for corruption during a limited over league in 2017.

Lokuhettige was the third Sri Lankan player charged for violating the anti-corruption code following cases against former captain and ex-chief selector Sanath Jayasuriya and former paceman Nuwan Zoysa.

Jayasuriya was charged for failing to cooperate with a match-fixing probe and concealing information. Zoysa was suspended over match-fixing accusations.

'I feel like a director of a soap opera'

AFP, Melbourne



Australia cricket coach Justin Langer admitted Monday he feels like a "director of a soap opera" as speculation grew around the future of banned Steve Smith and David Warner.

Debate about the pair reared again during the third Test against India in Melbourne, after Smith and Cameron Bancroft gave television interviews about the ball-tampering scandal in South Africa in March.

Their comments were widely interpreted as deflecting all blame onto Warner, with some former players slamming them for unnecessarily dredging it back up on Boxing Day, the most revered day in the Australian cricket calendar.



JUSTIN LANGER

Australia team as a "dysfunctional family", said the headlines were yet another headache.

"It's all just part of the soap opera we're in every day," he said in Melbourne before heading to Sydney for Thursday's fourth and final Test, with India leading the series 2-1.

"I feel like a director of a soap opera at the moment, I honestly do.

"Coaching is about man management and looking after people, caring for people, and that

was just another distraction last week," he added. Bancroft, who was banned for nine months, made his return on Sunday evening for the Perth Scorchers in the Big Bash League, but only lasted three balls. Smith and Warner's suspensions run out in late March.

Langer said cricket authorities were "in touch with the boys all the time".

"There's a really good process we're going to go through to get the boys back into the team," he added of the trio.

They could possibly return for a one-day international in late March, when Australia have pencilled in a series against Pakistan in the United Arab Emirates.

"We've got a lot of guys learning on the run at the same time," said Langer, acknowledging a lack of experience. "That's not easy for them, but we'll collectively be better for it over time."