

# SPORT



## Mushfiqur 'extremely doubtful'

MAZHAR UDDIN from Wellington

Just as he entered the Basin Reserve Stadium in Wellington, the venue for Bangladesh's second Test against host New Zealand, Mushfiqur Rahim looked up at the heavens, muttered something under his breath and joined his team mates for the warm up session yesterday.

It was at the Basin Reserve that the experienced cricketer and then captain smashed a magnificent 159 in the first Test against the Kiwis back in 2017 and, along with Shakib Al Hasan, added a record 359-run fifth-wicket stand for the Tigers.

In the second innings of that game the wicketkeeper-batsman sustained a blow on the back of his helmet off a Tim Southee bouncer and collapsed, laid on the ground for over 15 minutes before being taken off the field by an ambulance to a nearby hospital.

Despite posting a huge 595 for nine declared in their first innings, shockingly, the visitors went on to lose the game by seven wickets on the fifth day.

Two years on, the Tigers are once again in a desperate situation after losing the first Test by an innings and 52 runs in Hamilton.



Bangladesh's stand-in skipper Mahmudullah Riyad might be wondering if he will have the valuable service of the experienced Mushfiqur Rahim in the second Test against New Zealand starting tomorrow in Wellington. PHOTO: BCB

In the absence of regular Test skipper Shakib Al Hasan, who is also suffering from injury, it was Mushfiqur whom the team management would have wanted desperately in the middle order for stability.

Going back to yesterdays' training Mushfiqur looked determined and positive when he walked

towards the outer nets, where he started batting drills after 13 days' gap since suffering multiple injuries in the third ODI.

He started the drill with soft rubber balls before switching to knocking against the cricket ball.

But just when he started mid-dling his shots, Mushfiqur experienced pain in his injured wrist and

went over to physio Thihan Chandramohan and informed him of his discomfort.

Although Mushfiqur's body language remained normal -- he was still smiling broadly with teammates after completing the batting drill -- Bangladesh head coach Steve Rhodes eventually revealed that the cricketer is 'ex-

tremely doubtful' for the second Test starting tomorrow.

"The situation with Mushy [Mushfiqur] is that he is trying his best to be fit as quick as possible for the Test matches. Today was his first drill hit with some tennis ball, rubber ball and he finished with some cricket ball work. When he got to the cricket ball there was still a little bit of soreness in that ligament area so it means he will be extremely doubtful for the second Test.

"It will take an amazing recovery overnight but we all hold out all the time for Mushy, but the good news may be that he is on course for the third Test. Let's hope there are no setbacks along the way," Rhodes told reporters after the training session yesterday.

Known for his determination and passion for the game, a disappointed Mushfiqur blamed his luck but was still hoping for a miracle.

"I still have some pain on my injured wrist area," Mushfiqur told The Daily Star. "Let's see I will bat tomorrow [Thursday] as well and after assessing my conditions the team management will give the final call, but it looks difficult. Obviously, I desperately want to return to the field as I have some good memories of this ground," he added.

## No more batsmen

SPORTS REPORTER from Wellington

The ongoing tour of New Zealand has long been anticipated to be a crucial and testing one for Bangladesh. The Tigers are playing their fourth ever three-match Test series and their first in the hostile and challenging New Zealand conditions and, ahead of the ICC World Cup in England and Wales this summer, it was billed as a vital build-up for the mega event.

But when it came to team selection for the tour, the selectors have proven unable to cover all bases despite knowing the challenges that the team would face.

Regular Test skipper Shakib Al Hasan was ruled out of the ODI leg and much of the Test series at the last moment because of injury, but surprisingly the selectors did not name any back-up for the champion all-rounder.

Following Mohammad Mithun and Mushfiqur Rahim's injuries in the second and third ODIs against New Zealand, Mominul Haque -- who was in New Zealand as part of the Test squad -- was included for the third ODI even though he is nowhere near the list of probable World Cup players.

Since Mushfiqur was unable to recover from a wrist injury ahead of the first Test, the selectors retained ODI squad member Soumya Sarkar, who initially did not find a place in the Test squad.

With Mushfiqur also set to miss the second Test, there is no option available for the team management even if they want to make changes in the batting department as outside the eleven that played in the first Test in Hamilton, the squad has two spinners in Taijul Islam, Nayeem Hasan and pacer Mustafizur Rahman, and no batsmen.

Making the picture even murkier, first-Test hero Tamim Iqbal was unable to do batting practice yesterday after feeling some pain in his groin while doing the fielding drills.

## 30-member squad named

SPORTS REPORTER



The national selectors picked a 30-member preliminary squad for the ICC World Cup to be held in England from May.

Chief selector Minhajul Abedin informed yesterday that they submitted the long list to the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), signalling the start of the think-tank's work for the big event.

The preliminary squad was mostly drafted with tried-and-tested players while injured pacer Taskin Ahmed got a place alongside uncapped batsman Yasir Ali, who hogged the spotlight during the last Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) while playing for Chittagong Vikings.

Taskin suffered an ankle injury during the BPL and was ruled out of the New Zealand tour but the 23-year-old right-arm pacer is expected to fully recover from the injury by April, likely in time to play some Dhaka Premier League super league matches.

"We have chalked out all the programmes for the World Cup and submitting the preliminary squad was the first step. As you know, there are some logistical issues. By mid-April we will trim the squad to the final 15 members to meet the ICC's deadline," Minhajul said.

The Tigers will play a tri-series against hosts Ireland and West Indies before flying for England to take part in cricket's mega-event.

## FROM THE LAND OF THE LONG WHITE CLOUD

### RESERVES OF UNIQUENESS

SPORTS REPORTER from Wellington

One of the oldest grounds in New Zealand, the Basin Reserve in Wellington has a rich history which the authorities try to preserve with a touch of uniqueness. Situated at the centre of the country's capital the stadium premises are open all throughout the year. Most people use the stadium in their daily lives as a walkway surrounded by the legacy of New Zealand cricket.

There is a cricket museum that displays all the historic items and memorabilia of all the cricketing nations that played at this ground. The Bangladesh team also donated a Test jersey bearing the autographs of all the members of the team back in 2017.

However, the museum is currently closed for renovation work and is expected to re-open in February 2020.

The stadium also has a big manhole on the pathway, and its cover is engraved with all the world records that have taken place at the Basin Reserve, including Brendon McCullum's record of playing 100 consecutive Tests for New Zealand.

Another unique feature of the ground, that will surely catch the eye, is

the picket fence along the boundary of the wind-swept ground. There are certain names written on each picket with a date and a serial number. The names are actually of those who have donated money for the stadium. Interestingly, anyone can have his name along the boundary fence if they donate a fixed amount of 140 NZ dollars -- not a very dear price to be permanently associated with one of the most interesting cricket grounds in the world.



Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal also has an injury cloud hovering over him ahead of the second Test in Wellington. The left-hander did not practise yesterday due to pain in his groin. PHOTO: BCB

The situation will be near-critical if the left-hander's injury does not heal on time. The nature of injuries is such that it can happen to anyone else, and any batsman missing out will result in the Tigers playing with a batsman short.

Although head coach Steve Rhodes said Tamim's issue was nothing major, he did admit that it is not an 'ideal world'.

"Look, it's one of those things sometimes as it's never an ideal world but what was really pleasing in the last game was to see someone like Soumya come in and do so well. In many ways, he was the backup batsman along with Liton Das. Fingers crossed, we get through tomorrow's [Thursday's] session, which will be very light. They will all be ready and fit for the second Test -- the ones who played in the first Test in the top order, hopefully will score runs and then we could have some selection headaches," Rhodes said.

## Rashid, Yashas lead Chittagong Open

SPORTS REPORTER



The Indian duo of Yashas Chandra and Rashid Khan returned flawless rounds of seven-under-65 to take the joint first round lead in the City Bank American Express Chittagong Open, which got underway at the Bhatary Golf and Country Club in Chattogram yesterday.

Yashas and Rashid enjoyed a slender one-shot lead ahead of compatriots Sanjeev Kumar and Mohammad Sanju at the 40-lakh-rupee event.

Sajib Ali was the highest-placed Bangladeshi golfer, tied in fifth position with a five-under-67.

Yashas, the 2018 PGTI Emerging Player of the Year, said, "I really enjoyed my first competitive round in Bangladesh. My low score can be attributed to my outstanding tee shots and approach shots. I was never

in trouble at any stage and never looked like dropping a shot as I kept landing it close."

Two-time Asian Tour winner Rashid Khan, who also went error-free on day one, produced some quality chip-putts for four of his seven birdies. His longest conversion of the day, a 15-footer, came on the 12th. Rashid made birdies on all the four par-5 holes.

Sajib, too, came up with a bogey-free effort in round one. His 67 placed him tied fifth along with the Indian quartet of Mukesh Kumar, Honey Baisoya, Kshitij Naveed Kaul and Veer Ahlawat.

Defending champion N Thangaraja of Sri Lanka and two-time PGTI winner Jamal Hossain Mollah of Bangladesh were in tied 19th with rounds of two-under-70. Shakhawat Hossain Sohel, another popular golfer in the local scene, ended the opening round on a par.



Having thumped Bangladesh in the first Test, hosts New Zealand seemed to be planning how to seal the series during practice yesterday at the Basin Reserve in Wellington, the venue for the second Test starting from tomorrow.

## Seminar on umpiring 'bias'

SPORTS REPORTER

A number of issues were raised and a few solutions suggested regarding the increase in alleged biased umpiring instances in Bangladesh's first, second and third division cricket leagues during a seminar titled 'Biased Umpiring in Dhaka Cricket: Its Reality and Solution', organised by the Bangladesh Sports Journalist Association (BSJA) at the Bangladesh Olympic Association auditorium in the capital yesterday.

While there have been allegations of biased umpiring and favouritism in the past, such instances have increased recently with plenty of shameful umpiring events coming to the fore, especially in lower-tier divisions.

A number of speakers attempted to present solutions to the alleged bias that could destroy the cricket culture. The BSJA pointed out that the politics with the councillorship was behind the crisis.

Syed Ali Asaf, who was associated with Young Pegasus Club mentioned that he would be severing ties with the club after 28 years because he could no longer be complicit in the mentality that the club possesses.

"The 'win-at-all-costs' mentality needs to be changed. Previously, the strengths and weaknesses were the topics to discuss before playing any team but now the most discussed thing ahead of any game is 'who is the umpire?'," Asaf lamented.

Unlike Asaf, Riaz Ahmed Babu --

the secretary of Kalabagan KC -- was more timid but he did point out some major problems.

Babu mentioned that players' complaints regarding alleged biased umpiring do not reach higher authorities -- directing the statement towards chairman of the Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolitan (CCDM) Kazi Inam Ahmed -- who was present. Babu also questioned the fairness of the umpires' committee which has had Soibab Hossain Tutul serving as member secretary for decades.

Interestingly, Tutul was also one of the invited guests but did not show up. Another invited guest who missed the event was chairman of the umpires' committee -- Shafiqul Islam Shopon. Former national captain Gazi

Ashraf Hossain added that such instances were thought of as human error before but are now intentional.

However, it was mentioned by Sayeeduzzaman, the senior sports reporter of Kaler Kantho, that umpires were not the only 'malicious elements in cricket'. He said that umpires also took directives from the directors of the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB).

The issue of umpire allotment was also discussed during the seminar, with the main problem being the same umpires continuing to be employed even after allegations were made against them. Most of these questions were directed towards CCDM chairman Inam, but he retorted that the CCDM is not responsible for umpire allotment.



Rashid Khan of India tees off at the Bhatary Golf and Country Club on the opening day of the City Bank American Express Chittagong Open yesterday. PHOTO: RIZ EVENTS