



**Mustafizur Rahman -- the most experienced pacer in the current Bangladesh Test squad -- is expected to play in the second Test at Wellington today after being rested for the first Test.**

PHOTO: BCB

## Can Tigers crack 20?

MAZHAR UDDIN from Wellington

Of the 113 Tests Bangladesh have played so far including the first Test against New Zealand in Hamilton last week, 52 have been played abroad and 61 at home.

Bangladesh have won a total of 13 Tests and just four of those have come playing away from home.

The first ever away Test win for Bangladesh came nine years after the country was granted Test status, and the triumph came against a severely depleted West Indies side in 2009 when the visitors swept the two-match Test series 2-0.

The two other away Test wins for the Tigers were the 143-run win over Zimbabwe in Harare in 2013 and the memorable four-wicket win over Sri Lanka at the P Sara Oval in Bangladesh's landmark 100th Test in Colombo in March 2017.

A common saying in cricket prescribes that if you want to win a Test match, you have to pick 20 opposition wickets and the bowlers managed to do that in each of those four away wins.

The only time that Bangladesh managed to pick 20 wickets away from home and lost the game was against the West Indies last year at Kingston, where the visitors went on to lose the second of two Tests by 166 runs.

The Tigers came really close against

Pakistan in Multan in 2003, when they picked 19 wickets before Inzamam-ul Haq's heroic unbeaten hundred snatched a one-wicket win to deny Bangladesh their first ever Test win.

Ahead of the second and series-saving Test against the Kiwis at the Basin Reserve, stand-in skipper Mahmudullah Riyad was asked whether the visitors really believed that they could win a Test in New Zealand.

"Yes, I believe that. Although it will be a tough challenge... I believe we can win."

However, when it comes to winning a Test match, the main mantra is to take 20 wickets but the disappointing show in Hamilton by seamers Abu Jayed, Khaled Ahmed and Ebadot Hossain -- who conceded 369 runs in 87 overs for just one wicket -- does not inspire much confidence.

When asked whether the bowlers are capable of picking 20 wickets, Mahmudullah said: "Obviously it will be challenging and I believe we have to use the conditions as our strength is very limited. It will be important that we can utilise our limited strengths and execute well, and if we can do that the result will take of itself."

It is almost confirmed that Mustafizur Rahman is set to play the second Test starting today as Khaled is expected to make way for the left-arm seamer.

There will be high expectations on Mustafizur, who has been the frontline seamer and the most experienced among the current lot with 12 Tests and 27 wickets. But there are still some questions about the venom of the left-arm seamer away from home as he has scalped just 11 wickets in four Tests abroad -- a stark contrast to his limited-overs performances.

Although Mahmudullah backed his seamers after the below-par performance in the first Test, the skipper did add that he expects more consistency from his pacers.

There has also been a perennial question mark relating to the level of interest and enjoyment Bangladesh seamers possess for the longest format of the game and their urge to bowl long spells. As a result, Bangladesh has had to make frequent changes to their pace-bowling personnel as the team management is yet to identify a specialist pace bowler for Tests.

The over-dependence on Mustafizur has also put the 23-year-old under tremendous pressure and it will be important to release some of it from the Fizz and prepare other options in the fast bowling department.

But from today, Mustafizur will be the centre of attention with the other pacers in orbit and only time will tell whether they would be able to exploit the windy Wellington conditions and if they can indeed scalp 20 wickets in a Test match.

## Abahani to take on BKSP as DPL kicks off today

SPORTS REPORTER



The Dhaka Premier League (DPL) gets underway today at three different venues with defending champions Abahani

taking on BKSP in one of the three opening day fixtures at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

There has been a lot of talk about the league -- which was once the main attraction of the country's cricket calendar -- losing its charm, but Abahani coach Khaled Mahmud believed that the DPL is still important and prestigious. The former

national skipper also opined that the national players can take the league as an opportunity to prepare for the ICC World Cup to be held in England from May 30.

"I think it is a very prestigious and important league of the country. Generally, the league matches take place on good batting wickets and it is expected that the World Cup will also be played on batting-friendly tracks, so it would be fantastic if the players take this chance to fine-tune before the World Cup," said Mahmud, also a Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) director.

Although it was an expected that Abahani would get the services of the inspirational Mashrafe Bin Mortaza from the second match but Mahmud said that he did not have a clear idea about Mashrafe's availability.

"Unfortunately, he is now abroad and I was also not aware about when he went; I can only say when he will be available after his return," informed Mahmud.

Meanwhile, Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club face Uttara Sporting Club at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium and Legends of Rugganj meet Brothers Union at BKSP in the other matches.

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**Kiwis want to win Test by 'whatever way possible'**

New Zealand have pledged a win-at-all-costs approach to the second Test against Bangladesh, starting in Wellington on Friday, as they look to wrap up the series with a game to spare.

"We're looking to win the Test match in whatever way possible. Whatever gives us the best chance that is what we will do," New Zealand

opener Tom Latham declared Thursday.



**Two Abahani players -- Rubel Hossain and Mosaddek Hossain -- seem to share light moments with the injured Shakib Al Hasan during practice yesterday, ahead of their opening DPL encounter with BKSP today.**

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Rashid powers ahead

SPORTS REPORTER



Chittagong Open yesterday.

Md Sajib Ali continued to be the highest-placed Bangladeshi golfer for the second day in succession. Sajib gained one spot courtesy a 69 to be tied fourth at eight-under-136 at the halfway stage.

Two-time Asian Tour winner Rashid, the overnight joint leader, took the sole lead at

the Bhatiyari Golf & Country Club as his total moved to 13-under-131.

Indian teenager Kshitij Naveed Kaul too carded a 66 and as a result moved into second place at 11-under-133.

Rashid said, "It was an up and down day for me. I'm glad that I finished well with those birdies at the end. I was not feeling very comfortable at the start of the round as the wind kept switching. I was missing fairways by just a little bit at the start and as a result had to then focus on placing it well."

Round one joint leader Yashas Chandra of India slipped to tied seventh at seven-under-137 after a round of 72.

## A MULTIFACETED DYSFUNCTION

NABID YEASIN

A glance back through the pages of Bangladesh's Test history will reveal an inescapable reality -- the failure of the country's pacers in foreign conditions. Viewed through a historical lens, the insipid performance of the pacers in the recently concluded first Test in New Zealand is neither new nor surprising.

Bangladesh made their Test debut in November 2000 against India and since then the Tigers have played 113 Test matches, employing 39 different pacers -- four of whom were batsmen doing a bit of part-time seam-up bowling. The average of Bangladeshi quicks, home and away, stands at an appalling 57.25 -- comfortably the worst among the 10 Test nations over the period. The 37 Zimbabwean pacers in the country's 62 Test matches in that time have averaged 39.84 -- the next worst but still leagues better than Bangladesh. The

in home Tests. As recently as November 2018, Bangladesh opted to take the field without a single pacer and with a spin quartet comprising Shakib Al Hasan, Mehedi Hasan Miraz, Taijul Islam and Nayeem Hasan in the second Test against West Indies in Mirpur. This over-dependence on spinners may bring success at home but at a cost -- Bangladesh's meek surrenders while playing away, with a toothless pace attack often being the common factor.

It was Mehedi who scalped 12 wickets during Bangladesh's first-ever Test triumph against England in Mirpur in October 2016. In August of the following year, Bangladesh won by 20 runs against Australia at the same venue and this time it was Shakib's 10-for that made the difference. Over the two games the three specialist spinners -- Shakib, Mehedi and Taijul -- had bowled 235.4 overs while three pacers -- Kamrul Islam, Shafiqul Islam and Mustafizur Rahman -- only bowled a combined 18 overs.

The aforementioned triumphs clearly show how heavily Bangladesh rely on spinners at home and while they have brought successes, the same cannot be expected of the pacers whose opportunities to hone their craft at home are



severely limited by the number of overs and matches on offer for the faster men, resulting in them looking like ducks out of water on friendly pitches abroad.

Bangladesh could be said to have a stable batting unit as four of Bangladesh's



**The three pacers -- (3rd from L-R) Manjurul Islam, Alamgir Kabir and Tapash Baisya -- posed during Bangladesh's tour of Pakistan in 2003. It remains to be seen if Ebadot Hossain (L) -- the latest inclusion in Test squad -- follows the same path or not.**

PHOTO: AFP/STAR FILE

Big Five -- Tamim Iqbal, Mushfiqur Rahim, Mahmudullah Riyad and Shakib Al Hasan -- who form the core, have played together in 29 Test matches since 2009. However, such cannot be said of the bowling unit as Bangladesh have seen 22 different pacers over that same period. It does not help, of course, that the other member of the Big Five and possibly the best pacer Bangladesh has produced -- Mashrafe Bin Mortaza -- quit playing the longer version because of chronic knee problems, playing the last of his 36 Tests in 2009.

It was recently mentioned by Bangladesh's bowling coach Courtney Walsh that the decision-makers need to be patient and not shuffle pacers frequently, which has been the case so far. If we consider the Bangladesh's ongoing New Zealand tour, they are using a completely different set of pacers to the unit taken to the country in 2016-17 -- the Tigers' last tour of New Zealand.

The exclusion from the Test squad of Rubel Hossain, who has played 26 Tests --

more than the incumbent group of Mustafizur, Ebadot Hossain, Abu Jayed and Khaled Ahmed combined -- illustrates the point raised by Walsh. There have been previous instances of discontinuity. An example is Robiul Islam, who shone during the Zimbabwe tour in 2013, scalping 15 wickets in two Test matches and winning the player-of-the-series award. Robiul played the last of his nine Tests a year later against West Indies in Gros Islet, with fitness problems offered as a reason for his disappearance.

There is no one factor to point the finger of blame at when trying to explain Bangladesh's pace poverty. For a young Test nation, wins are important -- hence the over-reliance of spin at home. Bowlers like Robiul passing quietly into the night have as much to do with individual initiative as systemic problems. However, if Bangladesh do aspire to rise above the bottom of the Test table, it is the system that discourages pace bowling that has to change.



## Messi returns to Argentina squad

REUTERS

Argentina captain Lionel Messi is back in the national squad for the first time since last year's World Cup in Russia, and will play in at least one of their friendlies against Venezuela and Morocco this month, coach Lionel Scaloni said on Thursday.

The Barcelona forward has not played for his country since their last-16 exit at the hands of eventual champions France, opting to take a sabbatical after what was a disappointing tournament for the five-times Ballon d'Or winner.

## India boycott threat looms over cricket's global showpiece

Border tensions between India and Pakistan are casting a cloud over this year's cricket World Cup with the threat of a boycott hanging over their highly-anticipated clash in England.

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Weekend window

average for Bangladeshi pacers away from home is 58.40 -- also the worst.

Bangladesh's mentality of banking on spinners and making spin-friendly wickets at home to yield positive results in Tests could also be blamed for the pacers' mediocrity over the years. The scenario is much the same in domestic cricket. Since Bangladesh have made their Test debut, only India -- another country that traditionally relied on spinners -- have played 35 pacers in Tests, while teams like Australia, South Africa, New Zealand and England have employed 48, 43, 43 and 59 pacers respectively over that period.

A few instances could be brought to the fore to provide a glimpse into Bangladesh's reluctance to use pacers

### PACERS WORLDWIDE SINCE BANGLADESH'S TEST DEBUT IN NOV 2000

Team	Mts	Pacers	Wkts	Ave	5w	10w
South Africa	187	43	2509	27.04	99	18
Australia	214	48	2529	28.38	88	7
England	237	59	2773	30.79	97	10
New Zealand	151	43	1670	32.28	53	4
Pakistan	153	43	1346	33.01	50	4
India	200	35	1521	34.91	52	5
West Indies	178	49	1727	35.43	57	4
Sri Lanka	178	42	1219	37.35	26	1
Zimbabwe	62	37	478	39.84	14	0
<b>Bangladesh</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>463</b>	<b>57.25</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>0</b>

\*Test newcomers Afghanistan and Ireland have been excluded from the list as they have played just one Test each