



After missing out on the first two Tests against New Zealand, Mushfiqur Rahim (L), who practised in the outer nets of the Hagley Oval yesterday has a strong chance of featuring in the third and final Test from tomorrow. (R) Pacer Mustafizur Rahman and Soumya Sarkar practise catching, an area where Bangladesh need to improve markedly.

## Signs point to Mushy return

MAZHAR UDDIN from Christchurch

Generally, Mushfiqur Rahim's mood depends on his on-field performance and, known for his sheer determination and eagerness to play every game for Bangladesh, it was a welcome sight for the team management to see the wicketkeeper-batsman back in action again.

After sustaining multiple injuries during the third ODI against New Zealand on October 20,

when he added a finger wound to a wrist problem and a pre-existing rib injury, the 31-year-old went on to miss the first two Test matches.

Although Mushfiqur batted against a soft ball ahead of the second Test and experienced some pain in Wellington, yesterday was the first time that the right-hander batted properly against the cricket ball in the outer nets of the Hagley Oval in Christchurch.

All eyes were on Mushfiqur as he started the net session against the fast bowlers and looked comfortable muddling the ball. There

were a few instances when he did look uncomfortable with his batting grip, presumably due to wrist pain, but Mushfiqur managed to continue batting for nearly 10 minutes.

Later, he faced throwdowns from trainer Mario Villavayan, when he asked for short-pitched deliveries which he tried to duck under and also played some pull shots keeping Kiwi pacer Neil Wagner in mind.

"From what I saw in the nets, he looks good, though I haven't spoken with him after that. I was looking forward to how he bats

against the pacers and I think he coped quite well so we will just find out a little bit more." Tigers head coach Steve Rhodes told The Daily Star yesterday.

Following the thrashing innings defeats in the first two Tests the team management will definitely want Mushfiqur out in the middle order for much-needed stability. As things were shaping, it seemed that Mushfiqur was well on track to make a comeback in the third Test starting from March 16, and it will be a big boost for the visitors if he does return.

Meanwhile, another experienced batsman Tamim Iqbal suffered some pain on his groin during the fielding session yesterday and did not continue practice. But it was learned later that it was nothing serious and the in-form opener is expected to train today. Weather remains one of the biggest concerns as there is rain forecast during the start of the Test match but after the bitter experience in Wellington, the visitors will definitely be aware of the situation and will surely be eyeing a positive finish to an otherwise dismal tour.

## Intense Tigers seek correction

MAZHAR UDDIN from Christchurch

The tour of New Zealand has been a tough experience for the visiting Bangladesh team and following the comprehensive defeats in the first two Tests that saw them surrender the three-match series, the third and final Test in Christchurch will be the one last chance to gain something from this dismal trip.

There were quite a few areas where the Tigers lacked, especially with the bat as they have consistently been undone by the short-ball strategy from Neil Wagner.

Just before the start of the training session at the Hagley Oval in Christchurch, Bangladesh head coach gathered all the members of the squad and said:

"Look boys, if you prepare harder in training things will become easy when you go out to the middle during the games. I want you all to make the intensity higher here and be prepared for the challenge on the field."

In the outer nets of the Hagley Oval yesterday, the Tigers were keenly working on their weaknesses that were brutally exposed during the two Tests.

Young Shadman Islam has failed to score a half-century despite good starts in all four innings of the Test series. The 23-year-old was seen consulting with Rhodes before heading into the nets, where he stressed more on his defence and pull shot. Shadman was dismissed by short-pitched deliveries twice, while on two other occasions the left-hander was caught at the crease and paid the price. He asked for specific deliveries from the bowlers and made sure his foot movement was perfect.

In the net beside Shadman's, Tigers' fielding coach Ryan Cook was ready with a sidearm for a throwdown session with Liton Das and the South African asked: "Liton, who do you want to face today? [Kajiso] Rabada or Glenn McGrath?"

Liton, who was dismissed twice in four innings by Wagner, knew exactly who he wanted to bat against.

"Man I want Wagner, I want to face him."

STEVE RHODES

## Need to play more Tests: Jayed

SPORTS REPORTER from Christchurch

Pacer Abu Jayed can consider himself unlucky as, despite bowling well in the second Test when he removed both in-form Kiwi openers Tom Latham and Jeet Raval, the 25-year-old was denied the big wicket of Ross Taylor on the fourth day as the right-hander was dropped twice in the same over.

Taylor went on to smash his third double-hundred and Jayed was unable to pick further wickets and when offered sympathy for his misfortune, Jayed said: "I need a five-wicket haul and if I had got Taylor that day, I am sure I would have bagged a five. Obviously, luck plays a big role in picking up wickets but I will keep pushing myself to the limit."

Jayed did mention Bangladesh seamen's lack of experience when facing their Kiwi counterparts as the likes of Trent Boult, Neil Wagner and Tim Southeby have played a combined 168 Tests.

On the other hand, the four Bangladesh pacers Jayed (5), Ebadot Hossain (2), Khaled



Ahmed (2) and Mustafizur Rahman (13) have picked up 22 games combined.

"If you look at the bowlers of other countries they have all played a lot of Test matches, so I think we also need to play more. Test cricket is all about experience and the more you play, the more you learn and realise the nature of this game," Jayed told reporters at The Hagley Oval yesterday.

The cricketer from Sylhet played just five Tests and has been the most aggressive and impressive Bangladesh seamer in New Zealand so far as he

managed to trouble the Kiwi batsmen with his ability to swing it both ways.

According to Jayed, the tour of New Zealand has helped him to gain self-belief as he now has a better idea of his ability to cause trouble for international batsmen. He is now trying to learn the 'bubble' ball from Kiwi pacer Tim Southeby.

"I have spoken to [bowling coach Courtney] Walsh and I think we are developing as the ball swings a bit more here in New Zealand. I am also working on the 'bubble' ball that Southeby bowls, where the seam position will remain like an outswinger but it actually swings in after pitching. I will also talk with Southeby after the game to know more about it," he said.

Jayed, who has been a fan of English fast bowler James Anderson since childhood, informed that he has always tried to focus on aggression, which helps him to get the best out of himself.

Jayed's improvement is a sign for the team management to give inexperienced fast bowlers more opportunities consistently rather than dropping them after a few failures if Bangladesh want to prepare a new set of fast bowlers to thrive in Tests.



Abahani all-rounder Mohammad Saifuddin struck a fine 45-ball 59 before returning with the ball to pick up a solitary wicket as his side registered a 14-run win against Brothers Union in a Dhaka Premier League encounter yesterday. PHOTO: FERDZ AHMED

## Mash back in business as Abahani outshine Brothers

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh ODI captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza returned to business as usual with the willow and leather following a short break from cricket but it was Mohammad Saifuddin who guided Abahani to a 14-run victory over Brothers Union with an all-round performance in a Dhaka Premier League encounter at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Apart from Saifuddin's match-winning effort, a five-wicket haul from Ziaur Rahman and hundreds from Anamul Haque and Yasir Ali were highlights of the day at three different venues.

Yasir could have the hero of the match but his fine unbeaten 112-ball 106-run innings went in vain due to a lack of support from other batsmen as Abahani rode on a good team effort to win their third match on the trot.

Abahani recovered from 95 for four to put up a 236 for six in their share of 50 overs, courtesy of Nazmul Hossain's 73-ball 44, captain Masroor Hossain's 35-ball 54, Saifuddin's 45-ball 59 and Mashrafe's unbeaten 115-ball 106. Brothers also made a poor start by losing four wickets for 62 runs and eventually finished their 50-over quota on 222 for eight despite Yasir's effort. Mashrafe and Sabbir Rahman claimed two wickets each but Rubel Hossain and Masroor also did a good job with some

economical bowling even though they remained wicketless.

In a low-scoring affair at the Khan Shaheb Osman Ali Stadium in Fatah, Ziaur won with the ball as his fifer and a four-wicket haul from Saifuddin's 112-ball 106-run innings helped him dismiss Shinerupur Cricket Club for 94 runs and secure a 12-run victory in their first successive three matches.

Earlier Shoriful Islam and Sabbir Hossain dictated the terms with the ball as Sheikh Jamal were bundled out for 106.



ANAMUL... 100 n.o ZIAUR... 5 for 23

At BKSP, Anamul denied Legends of Rupganj any hopes of winning with their paltry total of 163 as his scintillating unbeaten hundred saw Prime Bank Cricket Club reach the target in 31.3 overs with nine wickets in hand. Prime Bank skipper Anamul struck 100 off 111 balls, featuring 12 fours and two sixes. Mohor Sheikh, Al Amin Hossain, Ariful Haque, Abdur Razzak and Alok Kapali scored two wickets each by the platform for Anamul and bag their second win in three matches.

### SCORES IN BRIEF

**ABAHANI V BROTHERS UNION**  
ABAHANI: 236 for 6 in 50 overs (Nazmul 44, Masroor 54, Saifuddin 54 not out, Mashrafe 56 not out; Mehedi 2-58, Nareem 2-28)  
BROTHERS UNION: 222 for 8 in 50 overs (Yasir 106 not out, Shoriful 21, Shoriful 17, Masroor 2-39, Sabbir 2-21)

**Results:** Abahani won by 14 runs.  
**RIJHAN V PRIME BANK**  
RIJHAN: 163 all out in 46.1 overs (Olim 52, Jaker 47, Mohor 2-14, Ariful 2-38, Razzak 2-25, Kapali 2-12)  
**PRIME BANK:** 166 for 1 in 31.3 overs (Anamul 100 not out, Rubel 44, Alok 1-30)  
**Results:** Prime Bank won by 9 wickets.

**Results:** Sheikh Jamal won by 12 runs.  
**RIJHAN V PRIME BANK**  
RIJHAN: 163 all out in 46.1 overs (Olim 52, Jaker 47, Mohor 2-14, Ariful 2-38, Razzak 2-25, Kapali 2-12)  
**PRIME BANK:** 166 for 1 in 31.3 overs (Anamul 100 not out, Rubel 44, Alok 1-30)  
**Results:** Prime Bank won by 9 wickets.



### Hathurusingha called back home

Sri Lanka recalled head coach Chandika Hathurusingha ahead of a three-match T20 series in South Africa amid reports of tensions with several players. Hathurusingha will return home after the fifth and final ODI on Saturday, the Sri Lankan board said. Despite reports about ructions within the Sri Lankan camp, the board said in a statement that the recall was to discuss the team's preparations for the World Cup starting at the end of May.

SCAN THE QR CODE TO READ THE STORY



## A Messi masterclass

AFP, Barcelona

Lionel Messi pledged at the start of the season to bring 'like, beautiful' cup' back to the Camp Nou and on the evidence of Wednesday night, few would bet against him.

Barcelona's 5-1 thrashing of Lyon in their Champions League last 16 second leg, a score that overlooked a nervy spell in the second half when the visitors were a goal from going through, in the end, was all about him.

Messi scored twice, including once from the penalty spot, although it was not an ordinary spoon-kick, instead a delightful chip that hung in the air and plopped perfectly down the middle.

There was a pair of assists too, for Gerard Pique and Ousmane Dembele, during a three-goal flurry in the final 12 minutes, with Messi leaving Lyon defenders sprawled to add a second of his own.

"Almost everything went through Messi," said Lyon coach Bruno Genesio, whose team had held Barcelona to a 0-0 draw in the first leg. "When he is at that kind of level he is almost unstoppable. We did what we could."

They restricted him to two goals, one short of Cristiano Ronaldo's hat-trick that had sent Juventus through and Atletico Madrid crashing out in Turin on Tuesday.

Messi paid tribute: "Cristiano had a magical night," he said.



Barcelona superstar Lionel Messi scored twice and gave two assists during their 5-1 win in the Champions League Round of 16 second leg match against Lyon at the Mou Camp on Wednesday. PHOTO: AFP

The talk has been of a changing of the guard, after Real Madrid's European hegemony was ended by Ajax, and a new era, with Spain having only one side in the Champions League quarterfinals for the first time since 2010.

But Messi and Ronaldo remain constant, the former now on 108 goals in the competition, behind the latter's imperious 124.

Each still has the power to settle a tie on their own and those most ardent in the debate about who is

greater might be hoping for a Barca-Juventus showdown when the draw for the quarterfinals is made on Friday.

"Big players like Leo and Cristiano, they give you so much," said Pique. "Not just in results. Having Leo on your team makes you feel like you can face anything."

Certainly, Barca will be amongst the two or three opponents that clubs will be keenest to avoid, with only Manchester City and perhaps Liverpool, because of Ronaldo, carrying the same sense of power and momentum.