

SPORT



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal attended the preparation camp for the World Cup at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. The left-hander, who had opted not to play in the recently concluded DPL to work on his fitness, looked agile during Tigers' practice session.

'The aim is to perform my role'

SPORTS REPORTER



The reporters who regularly visit the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur are often faced with one question from opener Tamim Iqbal recently -- whether he looks like he lost some weight. It only reflects how resolute the left-hander is about his physical fitness ahead of the big challenges in the tri-nation series in Ireland and the ensuing ICC World Cup 2019 in England and Wales.

That is why missing out on match practice during the just-concluded Dhaka Premier League was not a big issue for the seasoned campaigner, though there is a saying that there is no better preparation than playing games.

"I am quite satisfied. My main focus was on physical fitness, rather than batting. I decided not to play the league as I had a different plan and I think I achieved that goal," said Tamim yesterday.

While talking to reporters, the Bangladesh opener responded to many issues, like difficult weather conditions in the United Kingdom, the challenges in the Ireland series, issues regarding the long-unsettled opening partnership and challenges of chasing 300-

If anything negative [about the Ireland series ahead of the World Cup] then it is the reality of playing 13 to 14 matches in one and a half months. I think the key will be to rest people because we know in the World Cup we cannot afford the luxury of rest. We will get the opportunity to play five matches there [Ireland], so if we can make changes after one or two matches to keep everyone fresh, that will be very important.

TAMIM IQBAL
BANGLADESH OPENER

plus runs in the World Cup.

Tamim, however, placed more emphasis on individual preparation, fine tuning and fitness, especially as they are going on a lengthy trek. He was also not ready to set any individual targets for the World Cup.

"No target. I think that whenever I set any

targets I don't achieve them. I know I don't have any century in the World Cup but I am not thinking about any target. I don't want to take any unnecessary pressure; I have other things to worry about, which is to do the role the team bestows on me. If I can go by the team's role, then the opportunity will come to play big knocks," said Tamim, adding that he was not interested in thinking about what he did earlier in England; instead, he has to work hard to achieve anything of note in the World Cup.

"I always tell you that it is the preparation that I can fully control and I can do whatever I want to do with my preparation. But I cannot always control what will happen on the field," he added.

Tamim, however, saw the challenges of practice under scorching heat at home as a blessing.

"Most probably, the weather will be altogether different in England. I think we have been doing the hard work here because it is challenging to run, bat, field and do gym work in this kind of weather and I believe it will help us in terms of physical fitness."

Tamim was also looking forward to a good rotation policy during the Ireland series to make sure a fresh team goes to the World Cup.

No place for Narine, Pollard in Windies squad

AGENCIES, Undated

Jason Holder will lead West Indies in the 2019 World Cup as the West Indies Cricket Board (WICB) announced the squad late on Wednesday.

Big-hitting batsman Chris Gayle will be playing his fifth World Cup as the squad comprises some big names like Andre Russell, Darren Bravo, Shai Hope, Shimron Hetmyer and Kemar Roach to name a few. Russel has played only one ODI since 2015.

The flamboyant Kieron Pollard, veteran batsman Marlon Samuels and star spinner Sunil Narine are some of the big names missing from the 15-member provisional squad.

The squad was picked by the newly appointed interim selection panel. The panel is chaired by Robert Haynes, along with Jimmy Adams and West Indies' newly appointed coach Floyd Reifer.

Speaking after announcing the squad, Robert said, "The selection panel looked at the skill set of the



SUNIL NARINE



KIERON POLLARD

players and the combinations. We have looked at the wickets that have been used in England in the past, players' fitness and their urge to represent West Indies. We came up with a balanced team who will represent West Indies in England."

SQUAD: Jason Holder (captain), Andre Russell, Ashley Nurse, Carlos Brathwaite, Chris Gayle, Darren Bravo, Evin Lewis, Fabian Allen, Kemar Roach, Nicholas Pooran, Oshane Thomas, Shai Hope, Shannon Gabriel, Sheldon Cottrell, Shimron Hetmyer



The time is now for Soumya and Liton

SPORTS REPORTER



It was a huge relief for Soumya Sarkar, who was going through a lean patch in the Dhaka Premier League (DPL), when he struck consecutive centuries in the last two games, the latter being the first double hundred by a Bangladeshi in List A cricket on Tuesday.

Earlier, when Soumya was unable to score runs in the DPL, many raised concerns about the left-hander's ability since he was included in the Bangladesh World Cup squad. Interestingly, after scoring the double ton, many are now praising Soumya by saying that his ability to devastate the opposition on his day was why the left-hander was picked for the World Cup.

The concerns about Soumya may have taken a back seat but there are still questions over Liton Das, another contender for the Tamim Iqbal's opening partner in the Bangladesh lineup. Liton, despite making starts in the DPL, was unable to convert those into big ones.

Since striking a blistering maiden international hundred in the final of the Asia Cup against India in Dubai in September last year, Liton has managed to cross fifty just once in his next nine games. That put the stylish right-hander under the microscope once again because of his lack of consistency.

But then again, the Tigers' think tank have kept backing both Soumya and Liton for their ability to attack the opposition regardless of pitch, conditions and the bowling attack but a lack of consistency has often irked many, especially when it came to providing enough opportunities to others.

It has been more than four years now that the pair have made their ODI debuts,

with Soumya set to play his 2nd World Cup.

During this period, Soumya has played 41 ODIs and scored 1274 runs at an average of 34.43, which includes two hundred and seven fifties.

Liton, on the other hand, has scored just 508 runs in 27 ODIs, averaging 19.53 with notable scores being a hundred and a fifty. He will be featuring in his maiden World Cup.

There are no questions about Soumya and Liton's talent and ability to tear apart oppositions on their day, but the time is ripe for the two cricketers to step up and justify their strengths on a regular basis, instead of the rare heroics day.

When Tamim started his international career a decade ago, he too was rated as a highly talented batsman who could take on the opposition single-handedly on his day. However, he realised that consistency is more important than just owning the tag of being an explosive batsman.

Although Tamim was all praise for Soumya for his double hundred, the experienced cricketer did mention that now was the right time for the two cricketers to step up when asked about finally finding his regular opening partner after much experimentation over the years.

"It's not a problem when it comes to a particular game but when you have a settled opening partner what happens is we can both understand the nature of our games. At times when I am not able to time the ball properly or despite playing good shots, the ball is going straight to the fielder, then the partner needs to take the extra chance.

"But if somebody is not settled it's very unfair to go and tell him to take chances as they also come through a process. But I am sure Liton and Soumya got enough chances and I am sure it's the best time for them to show the world how good they are," an optimistic Tamim told reporters yesterday.



It may be high time for talented and explosive batsmen Soumya Sarkar (L) and Liton Das to step up and take their game to the next level in the upcoming World Cup and remove the 'inconsistent' tag attached to their names.

PHOTO: STAR FILE



The players who are going to represent Bangladesh in the upcoming Street Child Cricket World Cup -- slated to be played from April 30 to May 9 in London -- were probably taking inspiration from national cricketers as they were watching the Bangladesh team practice in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: BCB

WOMEN'S PREMIER DIVISION CRICKET LEAGUE League kicks off today

SPORTS REPORTER

The Dhaka Women's Premier Division Cricket League kicks off today across three grounds at the Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protishtan (BKSP) in Savar.

Defending champion Abahani Limited, led by national all-rounder Jahanara Alam, will take on Sheikh Russel Sports Development Academy at BKSP ground-3 while Mohammedan Sporting Club will face Bangladesh Ansar and VDP cricket team at BKSP ground-4.

Rupali Bank Krira Parishad will lock horns against Keraniganj Cricket Academy at BKSP ground-2.

Ten teams will play each other in a round robin system, with the top five

teams in the points qualifying for the Super League stage.

The players' transfer of the fifty-over competition took place on April 20. A total of 85 players took part in the transfer, including eleven national team cricketers.

Rumana Ahmed and Khadija Tul Kubra, who played for Rupali Bank Krira Parishad and Mohammedan Sporting Club respectively in the previous season, will feature for newly promoted Sheikh Russel Sports Development Academy this season.

Among other national cricketers, top-order batter Sanjida Islam joined Khelaghar Samaj Kallyan Samity from Rupali Bank while all-rounder Lata Mandal will feature for Rupali Bank from Kalabagan Krira Chakra.



Team's turnaround at right time: Stoinis

ICC

Marcus Stoinis, the Australia all-rounder, said the team's turnaround in form has happened at the right time, just before the ICC World Cup 2019.

Australia had a tough 2018, but their fortunes have improved massively since the turn of the year. They beat India in India, after coming back from 2-0 down in a five-match one-day international series, and followed it up with a 5-0 sweep of Pakistan in the United Arab Emirates.

The eight back-to-back victories, along with the return of Steve Smith and David Warner, has meant Australia are now being considered among the favourites for the World Cup.

"I think everyone is really confident. To win eight games in a row away from home was very important for us," Stoinis told reporters on the sidelines of a Royal Challengers Bangalore training session. "We needed it. We had lost a lot of games over the last year or so. It's good timing. Everyone started to believe in each other and we started to play well as a team."

The improvement of fortunes may seem sudden, but Stoinis said it was a gradual process. "From the outside, it might look like it happened all of a sudden, but it also shows that the game of cricket is only about minor details," he said. "Even in the time we were losing, we learnt a lot, started getting closer in a lot of games."

Stoinis was also delighted with the returns of Smith and Warner from their respective 12-month bans over the ball-tampering scandal last year. Both batsmen have lit up the IPL this year, with Warner leading the charts with 574 runs in 10 outings, with a century and seven half-centuries.



"It [their returns] is a massive boost," said Stoinis. "People have stepped up in the last few months and we have started winning games consistently. It all adds to the mixture and definitely adds to a World Cup winning combination."

Dhoni to rest before WC if...

REUTERS, Mumbai

India's Mahendra Singh Dhoni will not hesitate to take time off before World Cup if his nagging back problem worsens during the ongoing Indian Premier League (IPL), the stumper-batsman has said.

Chennai Super Kings skipper Dhoni missed last week's defeat by Sunrisers Hyderabad due to a back spasm and the 37-year-old is unwilling to risk a serious injury that could rule him out of the World Cup starting in England and Wales on May 30.

"It's holding up, it's not showing signs of getting worse. With the World Cup coming up, I have to keep in mind that I can't really get injured," Dhoni said of his injury after Chennai's six-wicket victory over Hyderabad on Tuesday.