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With their match against India slated for July 2 in Birmingham, the Bangladesh team were afforded a five-day break. Here, Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, wicketkeeper-batsman Mushfiqur Rahim and the latter's adorable son share a light moment ahead of their departure to England's second-largest city yesterday.

PHOTO: SAKIB SUBHAN

On crutches, but hopeful

SPORTS REPORTER from Southampton

There was an alarming sight in store for those gathered around the team hotel in Southampton yesterday. Rubel Hossain, Liton Das and Soumya Sarkar had already made the short walk from the main entrance and disappeared behind the team bus. Then Mahmudullah Riyad appeared, supported by crutches beneath each shoulder, and gingerly hobbled to the bus, concentrating on each step.

On Monday, during the 62-run win over Afghanistan in their World Cup match at the Ageas Bowl, Mahmudullah had hobbled between the wickets without the help of crutches while scoring 27 during a vital 56-run fifth-wicket partnership with Mushfiqur Rahim. After the match, team manager Khaled Mahmud said that scans revealed that Bangladesh's first World Cup centurion had sustained a Grade 1 tear on his right calf muscle.

"Mahmudullah has sustained a low grade calf injury. We will monitor his progress over the next few days with regards to his availability for the next World Cup match," team physio Thihaan Chandramohan said in a statement posted in the Bangladesh Cricket Board's official Whatsapp media group yesterday morning.

The Export Leader

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Tunnel vision the way forward?

SAKIB SUBHAN from Southampton

It is hard for anyone not in the dressing room to know how it is to be in the position the Bangladesh team are currently. On the one hand they have played better cricket than most, especially non-Bangladeshis, had expected, have given the ongoing World Cup some exciting cricket, its best player and the team woke up yesterday morning having thoroughly outclassed Afghanistan the day before. On the other, with two matches left they are one loss away from an exit from the World Cup and the first of those two matches is against a team that is as yet unbeaten. Even if they win their next two matches against India and Pakistan, Bangladesh could still crash out if other results do not go their way.

While their fans feel nervous and speculate about outcomes and eventualities, there are perhaps only two ways to look at such a situation for those who are in the eye of the storm and bear the weight of expectations of a cricket-crazed nation. One is to think of doomsday scenarios, fed by memories of how hard it has been against India in crucial matches. The other is to think positively about how the deed can be done and eschew bad memories. With the team in good form, and misfortune rather than poor performance being the hindrance so far, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and Co seemed to have adopted the latter viewpoint.

"There were a lot of calculations till now," he said while standing outside the team bus in Southampton,



prior to their departure for Birmingham, where the team will have seven days to think before their next match against India on July 2. "But now it is just about winning."

There are many considerations that may make it seem a mountain too high to summit -- India's ranking superiority and their perceived superiority in terms of ability have all been common topics of discussion amongst outsiders, including journalists whose job it is to see events in a historical context. But for the players who have to do the deeds on the field and face up to Jasprit Bumrah and bowl to Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli and MS Dhoni, it is all about the next match.

"If we want to go to the semifinals, we have to win," Mashrafe continued. "For us this match is the semifinal or final -- It's do or die. There is no longer scope to think

about how much we lag behind in strength or how far ahead they are. If we want to survive, we have to win."

Bangladesh teams have imploded under the weight of their own negativity in the past. The 2011 World Cup, the 2014 Asia Cup, the 2014 World T20 -- all at home -- are notable examples. However, the positive tunnel vision Mashrafe spoke of paid dividends as recently as the 2018 Asia Cup, when Bangladesh beat Afghanistan and Pakistan in must-win matches but lost narrowly against India in the final. It was a time when the cliché of 'focused on the next match' was forged by force of circumstance into clarity of thought and action in the matches.

After beating Afghanistan on Monday, Bangladesh's best performer Shakib Al Hasan had offered similar sentiments about their upcoming match against India. The outstanding player of the World Cup seemed to have adopted tunnel vision earlier than his teammates, judging by his performances, and was not willing to look back even if it was for inspiration.

"Experience will help, but experience is not the end of the world," he had said when asked about Bangladesh's last World Cup win over India in 2007, which knocked the superpowers out at the group stage. "We have to play our best cricket in order to be able to beat India. We have the belief that we can play well in next two matches and get the result. That's all we can do at this moment."

It remains to be seen whether the rest of the team can follow their two leaders, in inspiration and performance, and adopt the tunnel vision when push comes to shove.



"It's a Grade 1 tear. But its curable. Our next match is on July 2 [against India]; we have seven days in hand and we will try to get him fit in that period," said Mahmud before boarding the team bus yesterday. "It's fifty-fifty at the moment; we cannot say today that he will be able to play the match but we are hopeful that he can play. Mahmudullah is a very important player in our team. I believe that Riyad will be fit."

"After the scan report revealed that it would take seven to 10 days to recover from the injury, Riyad said that he would play against India, whatever his state," skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza had said earlier. "Since the mental strength is there, he will be able to overcome any physical weakness."

So much to learn from Shakib: Soumya

SPORTS REPORTER

Soumya Sarkar said that he had a lot to learn from Shakib Al Hasan and that it was big factor for the Bangladesh players to share a dressing room with the world's number one ODI all-rounder.

Asked whether the team congratulated Shakib after his performance against Afghanistan, Soumya said: "We congratulated him in the meeting after the match. To share the dressing room with him is a big factor for us. He has so many records and we have a lot to learn from him."

He was of the opinion that Shakib's legend status can only be discussed after he finishes playing but focused on the impact Shakib is having on him.

"When he finishes playing, he will become a legend. Especially for me, I have a lot to learn from him and the more I see him, the more I am amazed. He is continuously performing and notching record after record," Soumya opined.

Soumya said that the India match on July 2 provides them with a 'chance' to go on and play the last match against Pakistan with belief. "We will try to give our best to win the match. Whether we go through to the semis is a different aspect but if we win the match [against India], the chance it will create for us will get us ready for the next match [Pakistan]," he said.

Before the match against Afghanistan, Soumya had always come on as an opener at this World Cup. Liton Das opened the innings against Afghanistan and Soumya said that he was ready to play in any position where it benefitted the team.

"I have always said that I will play where the team requires me to. If I score a run and that contributes to the team then it makes me happy."



Australia fast bowler Mitchell Starc (R) castled Ben Stokes with a thunderbolt yorker to crush England's hopes in the run-chase during their World Cup match at Lord's in London yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS



Kane turns bat into a guitar

AGENCIES, London

New Zealand captain Kane Williamson's bat has been on song, with 373 runs in 4 innings so far in the ICC World Cup. However, in a promotional activity, Williamson took it to another level as he turned his bat into a guitar.

Alongside Mike Wilton in a live session, he played some tunes from his cricket bat shaped guitar. The official handle of the Cricket World Cup even shared the video of the same on Twitter. Williamson-led New Zealand side is having a wonderful campaign so far as they remain unbeaten in the tournament. They are also at the top of the points table at the moment.

After a nail-biting victory at Manchester over the West Indies, the Kiwis will be facing the unpredictable Pakistan team at Birmingham on Wednesday. A win will make them the first team to qualify for the semifinals.

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NEW ZEALAND V PAKISTAN

LIVE FROM 3:30PM

(BANGLADESH STANDARD TIME)

RAHIM STEEL

Ben Stokes played a crucial role for England in their World Cup encounter against Australia at Lord's yesterday. The all-rounder first provided a vital breakthrough by dismissing Usman Khawaja, ending with the figures of one for 29 from his six overs. Stokes then steadied the ship for the hosts after they lost early wickets, smashing his third fifty of the tournament to keep their hopes of chasing the 286-run target alive.

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AUS-ENG SCOREBOARD					
AUSTRALIA			R/B As/6s		
Finch c Woakes					
b Archer	100/116		1/2		
Warner c Root b Moeen	53/61		6/0		
Khawaja b Stokes	23/29		1/0		
Smith c Archer b Woakes	38/34		5/0		
Maxwell c Buttler b Wood	12/8		1/1		
Stoinis run out	8/15		1/0		
Carey not out	38/27		5/0		
Commins c Buttler b Woakes	1/4		0/0		
Starc not out	4/6		0/0		
Extras: (lb-1, lb-5, w-4)	8				
Total: (For 7 wickets in 50 overs)	285				
Did not bat: Lyon, Behrendorff.					
Fall of wickets: 1-123, 2-173, 3-185, 4-213, 5-228, 6-250, 7-259.					
Bowler			R/B As/6s		
Woakes	10	0	46	2	
Archer	9	0	56	1	
Wood	9	0	59	1	
Stokes	6	0	29	1	
Moeen	6	0	42	1	
Rashid	10	0	49	0	
ENGLAND			R/B As/6s		
Vince b Behrendorff	0/2		0/0		
Bairstow c Commins b Behrendorff	27/39		5/0		
Root lbw b Starc	8/9		1/0		
Morgan c Commins b Starc	4/7		2/0		
Stokes b Starc	89/115		8/2		
Buttler c Khawaja b Stoinis	25/27		2/0		
Woakes c Finch b Behrendorff	26/34		2/0		
Moeen c Carey b Behrendorff	6/9		1/0		
Rashid c Stoinis b Starc	25/20		3/1		
Archer c Warner b Behrendorff	1/2		0/0		
Wood not out	1/2		0/0		
Extras: (lb-1, lb-5, w-3)	9				
Bowler			R/B As/6s		
Behrendorff	10	0	22	5	
Starc	8.4	1	43	4	
Commins	8	1	41	0	
Lyon	9	0	43	0	
Stoinis	7	0	29	1	
Maxwell	2	0	15	0	
Result: Australia won by 64 runs					
Player-of-the-match: Aaron Finch					