

SPORT



Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman fine-tunes his skills ahead of the first of a three-match ODI series against Sri Lanka at the R Premadasa Stadium in Colombo today. A lot will rest on the shoulders of Bangladesh's bowlers if the Tigers are to make a good start to the series.

PHOTO: AFP

'Will feel special if the team wins or plays well'

SPORTS REPORTER from Colombo



All eyes will be on Lasith Malinga when the first of a three-match ODI series between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka takes place at the R Premadasa Stadium in Colombo today as it will be the legendary fast bowler's last ever match in the format.

Although Bangladesh stand-in captain Tamim Iqbal wished Malinga good luck ahead of the match, the Tigers' 14th ODI captain intends to give no quarter against Sri Lanka.

"Tomorrow [today] is a special match for him [Malinga]. And one thing for sure is that when we will play against him, we won't keep in mind that it's his last match and we will try to make it as tough for him as possible. We will try to win the match for Bangladesh cricket. It's really amazing the things he achieved for Sri Lanka cricket and for the whole world. Best wishes to him from me and my teammates. I heard he will continue in the T20 cricket. I want to wish him good luck for that but not much for tomorrow's match," Tamim told reporters ahead of the first ODI in Colombo yesterday.

Tamim will enter a new era of his career when he leads the Tigers' one-day side for the first time after being appointed as captain in the last moment. The decision to have Tamim skipper the side came after regular captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza incurred a hamstring injury and the dashing opener informed that his main aim today will be to start the first session well and move forward one step at a time.

"At the moment, our first target is to start the first session well. I always think and say this all the time, it is a problem if we start focusing on the finishing line before the starting line. Tomorrow [today] we have to start well, regardless of whether we bowl or bat first. And of course, our main target will be to win the match. We want to move forward one step at a time.

series. You have to do small things properly and it will start from the first ball of the match. It does not matter whether we bat or bowl first."

According to Tamim the success of a captain depends on how well the other ten members of a team perform and that is why he expects his teammates to step up and make a collective approach.

"I am not thinking about my debut as the captain of the Bangladesh team but it feels good to hear after being mention



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TAMIM IQBAL
Bangladesh stand-in captain

by you [journalists]. The important thing for me is how I start. These things give satisfaction when the team does well. If we win tomorrow [today] or the team plays well then I will feel special as a captain. I believe if the rest of the 10 players play well then it will prove how someone does as a captain," he said.

Lots at stake in series opener

MAZHAR UDDIN from Colombo



The first of the three-match ODI series between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka has special significance for both teams for various reasons. Sri Lanka is all set to bid farewell to legendary fast bowler Lasith Malinga from ODIs, which has already created a lot of buzz among fans as tickets for the first match are already sold out.

Secondly, cricket will return to Sri Lanka for the first time since the tragic suicide bombings in Colombo on April 21 this year and Bangladesh are the first international team to visit the country after the attack.

The day-night game is scheduled to begin from 3.30 pm BST at the R Premadasa Stadium in Colombo today.

Amidst all the talks about the possible sacking of Sri Lanka head coach Chandika Hathurusingha, Sri Lanka would want to come out hard against Bangladesh as the rivalry between the two sides has reached new height over the last few years.

At the same time, Dimuth Karunaratne and his troops will desperately want to give a winning farewell to Malinga -- Sri Lanka's third highest wicket taker behind Muttiah Muralidaran and

Chaminda Vaas and also sits in tenth place in the all-time ODI wicket-takers' list with 335 scalps.

For Bangladesh, it will be a huge challenge for the visitors to register their first ever ODI series win in Sri Lanka without two stalwarts in regular skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, who was ruled out due to a hamstring injury at the last moment, and Shakib Al Hasan, who opted to take a leave followed by a brilliant World Cup campaign.

Tamim Iqbal will be making his debut as captain of the Tigers in ODIs, but it will be a tough ask for the dashing cricketer to marshal his troops against the Lankans, who have always been a tough side to beat on their home soil.

Despite the comfortable five-wicket win against the Sri Lankan Board President's XI in the practice game on Tuesday, the Tigers' think tank will be worried about the bowling department, especially in the death overs in the absence of young Mohammad Saifuddin, and of course Mashrafe.

According to sources close to the team, Shafiqul Islam is expected to make a comeback to the ODI side after three years after joining the team as a last-minute inclusion mostly because of a lack of confidence in pacer Taskin Ahmed.

Mustafizur Rahman and Rubel Hossain are expected to lead the fast bowling attack while

Mehedi Hasan Miraz, Mosaddek Hossain and Mahmudullah Riyad -- who has recovered sufficiently from a shoulder injury -- will look after the spin department.

Although he was struck on the elbow while receiving throwdowns at the nets yesterday, Soumya Sarkar is expected to open the innings with Tamim, who will be desperately looking to return to his groove after a rather disappointing World Cup campaign.

Mohammad Mithun, who scored 91 in the practice game, will bat at number three, a position in which Shakib has been phenomenal in the World Cup. The experienced Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad will once again have to play key roles in the middle order with Sabbir Rahman expected to score quick runs in the lower middle order.

Of the seven wins in 45 ODIs against Sri Lanka in ODIs so far, Bangladesh won three in the last two years and the intense Nidahas Trophy campaign last year took the rivalry between the two sides to a higher level.

Tamim Iqbal is 129 runs away from becoming the first Bangladeshi to score 7,000 runs in ODIs and it will be interesting to see whether the Tigers will be able to register their first ever win in the fifty-over format at the R Premadasa Stadium, where they have lost all previous eight games.

Our Slinga, our pride: Karunaratne

SPORTS REPORTER from Colombo

'Our Slinga, our pride' read a huge banner placed at the entrance of the R Premadasa Stadium in Colombo. That perhaps said it all as Sri Lanka cricket is all set to bid farewell to legendary fast bowler Lasith Malinga, for whom the first of a three-match ODI series against Bangladesh today will be his last for the island nation.

The tickets for the match have been already sold out, which was demarcated by a sign posted outside the stadium's ticket booth. All of Sri Lanka has geared up to provide a fond farewell to their last representative of the golden generation of Sri Lankan cricket with Malinga having decided to hand up his boots in the fifty-over format to make-way for the youngsters who need to be prepared for the next World Cup.

Sri Lanka skipper Dimuth Karunaratne hopes to bid farewell to Malinga with a win in order to bring a just end to the legend's illustrious 15-year career.

"The best thing we can give him [Malinga] victory and that's what we are planning. Other than that, we discussed a few things in the dressing room before leaving for the hotel. But mainly we want to focus on winning the match that's the best thing we can do for him. He is a legend; he has done a really good job for more than 15 years. He has been our main bowler for the last few years.

"I think we will miss him and I don't think anyone can replace him. We asked him to stay for couple of more years but he wanted to give a chance to the youngsters to groom them for the World Cup so we accepted it. And we will try to give him the best farewell on this first one-dayer," Karunaratne told reporters ahead of the match yesterday.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh stand-in skipper Tamim Iqbal also gave his best wishes to Malinga, saying that he was the reason why many budding cricketers became fast bowlers.

"He is a great ambassador of cricket. I think he is a cricketer whom a lot of youngsters saw him play. I remember when he first came to play especially against Bangladesh, people wanted to bowl like him. Even when we came to play in Sri Lanka, we looked for bowlers in the nets who bowl like him. He had this type of impact in the cricketing world," said Tamim.



FALLACY OF BCB'S HYPERACTIVITY



BISHWAJIT ROY

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is probably the most hyperactive cricket authority as it wasted no time to take action following its team's exit from the ICC World Cup.

Forget about the other boards, even the abject display of their team in England was not enough for Cricket South Africa to show that vigour for starting the revamp process that the Nazmul Hassan-led BCB initiated by ending ties with head coach Steve Rhodes. The irony surrounding the decision was that they had put a premature end to the Englishman's tenure despite the BCB beating the drum of a satisfying World Cup campaign by the Tigers.

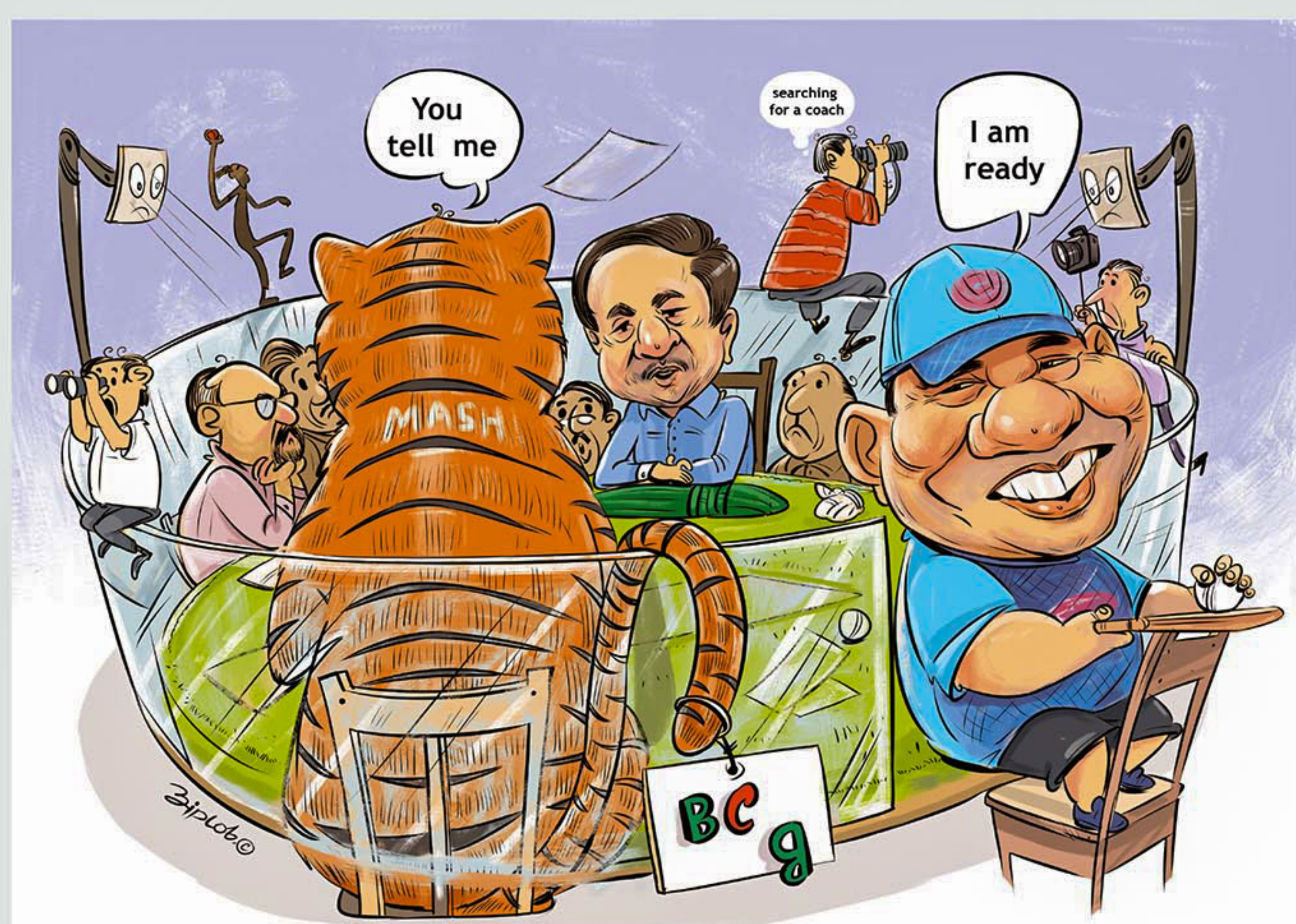
Why were BCB in such a hurry? You can only ask the question but cannot expect a logical explanation from this current board. The BCB boss so far tried to provide some logic behind this decision but the issues of 'his (Rhodes) style of coaching' and 'dearth of planning' only raises more questions.

"After considering everything, we decided that Rhodes is the right person for the job," was the statement from Hassan while announcing the name of Bangladesh's new head coach in June last year. It took them 13 months to realise that this gentleman was not suitable for the team, regardless of some successes during his tenure.

There is however hardly any doubt that when a decision does not come through a proper process it only creates chaos, which was evident in the latest activities surrounding the national cricket team.

Let's try to be positive. Let us assume that, under the leadership of Hassan, BCB was looking forward to take the performance of the national team to the next level and so was not ready to waste any time and instead go ahead with their new planning.

In that case what could have the honest move?



An extensive assessment of the World Cup performance could only reveal what they actually need to do with an eye towards the next World Cup. The board could have sought detailed reports from coach, captain, manager and special envoy Akram Khan to place it before the board meeting to set the next course of action. Instead, they were talking hither and thither with the latest one being that the 'break before the India match hampered Tigers'. And if the BCB boss believed that there were lapses on everyone's part, as he told reporters on Wednesday, then why are manager Khaled Mahmud and Akram not accountable. Not only this, but the board could also examine many things before the revamp process; if they actually want to revamp.

The most pressing issue for the board is to think about how they would fill

the big shoes of charismatic skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and how they are looking forward to seeing the team after Mashrafe. One cannot measure just by performance how immense Mashrafe's impact has been on Bangladesh cricket but the time has come for the board to think of life after Mashrafe. A professional board cannot wait for the response of a player regarding his future; they have to instead open up with their future plans with a man like Mashrafe.

Mashrafe fully deserves to bid international cricket goodbye in a ceremonial way and the board must ensure it but it is equally important that the board not waste any time in looking forward and solidifying future plans if they want to achieve anything big in the next World Cup.

The way Mashrafe overcame all the

injury odds to survive in international sport has become the stuff of sporting folklore and his effort will doubtless inspire future generations for long. It is no secret how he played international cricket with pain. Still, when the player himself admitted that the injury during the World Cup bothered him but still took part in the match it didn't reflect a good cricketing culture.

It may sound a bit harsh but a cricket team simply will not be able to take it to their next level of performance if they nurse this kind of culture.

So, there were a lot of pressing issues that the board could have discussed after the World Cup but they took the populist path of making someone a scapegoat. If this sort of culture exists than we can make big promises, but without any substance.