

# SPORT



Although rumours of a rift between Bangladesh's star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan and batsman Mahmudullah Riyad made the rounds during the World Cup in England, this picture does seem to quash those speculations as the pair were seen in a jovial mood during the Tigers' practice session in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Different shades of experience

MAZHAR UDDIN

With just a few days to go before the selectors name the squad for the one-off Test against Afghanistan, there are few areas of concern for Bangladesh, namely the pace department and a suitable replacement for star opener Tamim Iqbal.

There was a question of whether the selectors will opt for fresh faces or look to seasoned campaigners, but the selectors hinted yesterday that they may bank on experience.

In the absence of Tamim, who asked for a break from this series, the selectors are thinking of including an experienced player like Imrul Kayes to partner Shadman Islam so as not to put extra pressure on the rookie opener, who made a promising debut in Tests in December last year.

"As you know he [Shadman] has been with the team for the past few series and did a decent job. But he is still young and not that experienced. When Tamim was in the line-up there was less pressure on him. So, we are wondering whether or not a fresh face as his partner would put extra pressure on Shadman.

"But if we pick someone older so we will have a young player and an experienced player at the middle. We are thinking about

innings. The 32-year-old was also unable to score significantly for Bangladesh during the home series against Afghanistan last month.

In that light, it has to be asked what experience means for the selectors. Is it just a player who has spent a significant time since making his international debut or is it the consistency and maturity that makes a cricketer dependable that makes an experienced cricketer?

Talking of gaining experience, Liton Das is a genuine opening batsman who made his Test debut four years back, but the dashing right-hander has so far played 15 Tests batting in various batting positions -- ranging from opener to number eight.

Interestingly, Liton opened the innings in just nine of his 26 Tests so far and the selectors could try the right-hander as opener against Afghanistan and provide some freedom to play his own game.

The scenario is pretty similar in the fast bowling department as there are also a few 'experienced' players in the likes of Shafiqul Islam and Rubel Hossain, who has been playing international cricket for over nine years now.

Shafiqul made his Test debut back in 2010 and has played 11 Tests. His last Test was two years ago, against South Africa, and he is among the top contenders to make it to



SHAFIUL ISLAM



IMRUL KAYES

these issues, which is the reason we are waiting to announce the squad," selector Habibul Bashar told reporters yesterday.

This reflects the selectors' insecurity and lack of confidence in the pipeline. Imrul is experienced as he has been playing for 10 years, but he has also played just 37 Tests in that period, which indicates that there is not much confidence in Imrul being a long-term option.

Imrul played his last Test against West Indies last year and was dropped following a prolonged lean patch with the left-hander not reaching fifty in his last 22

Tests.

"It is not about providing places in the team as every team wants to win, whether it's a big or small team. No team goes to the middle thinking that that they are providing opportunities to players or looking to prepare a player; at the end of the day they go out to win the game. So, if including a newcomer or giving an opportunity to an experienced player fills that need, they will play," Bangladesh Test captain Shakib Al Hasan said when asked whether the team management would look to provide an opportunity for newcomers.

## Shakib: A man apart

SPORTS REPORTER



Shakib Al Hasan's thought process has always been different from the rest and perhaps that is why he has always been able to set himself apart with his performances on the field. Even when it comes to off the field activities, Shakib has always portrayed a different mentality compared to any other Bangladeshi player.

When Bangladesh was praised by former cricketers and cricket experts for their performance in the recent World Cup, it was Shakib who was bold enough to point out that results wise, it was actually a disappointing campaign for the Tigers.

While many were pondering the 'what ifs' -- with utmost certainty that the Tigers would have won the match against Sri Lanka had it not been washed out -- Shakib said that after a defeat in

their last World Cup match against Pakistan, Bangladesh were still miles away from justifying the praises they received for a World Cup where they won three matches to finish eighth.

Shakib still carries the same mentality -- that at the end of the day, the results always matter. With Bangladesh preparing for the one-off Test against Afghanistan, starting from September 5, Test skipper Shakib spoke on a lot of issues, ranging from the new coach to the replacement of Tamim Iqbal in the opening slot to make way for new faces. The 32-year-old echoed the sentiment of having a winning mentality while talking about the team's issues after an event on Sunday.

For instance, when Shakib spoke of all the positives that the new head coach Russell Domingo could bring to the team, he did not forget to mention how results will speak volumes on his possible success or lack thereof.

"At times it depends on results to see if the coach is doing good or not. Sometimes it may

happen that the coach is good but the result is not while the opposite is also possible," said Shakib.

Shakib also mentioned Tamim's replacement would be selected only after a thorough discussion with the management, adding that even if the team opts for a new face, it should not compromise their objective to win.

"Whenever any team prepares for a series or match they do not think that they are going with the intention to test new players. A team takes everything into account but at the end of the day, the target remains the same -- to win. We will also be playing with that target," concluded Shakib.

Shakib's message was clear, that they would go in with a winning mentality against any opposition regardless of whatever the tactics are required in the situation. It seems like Shakib is not the type who would be pleased to accept personal achievements, such as a century or five-wicket haul, as positives unless it brings the desired outcome, which is to win.



New Zealand bowler William Somerville (C) celebrates with his teammates after dismissing Sri Lanka's Kusal Mendis on the last day of the final Test against Sri Lanka in Colombo yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Kiwis crush SL to level series

REUTERS, COLOMBO



New Zealand skittled Sri Lanka out for 122 on Monday to secure a series-levelling victory

by an innings and 65 runs on the final day of a rain-hit second Test in Colombo.

New Zealand had batted on for five overs in the morning, allowing BJ Watling to complete a century before declaring their first-innings closed on 431 for six in reply to Sri Lanka's 244.

That gave the tourists, who lost the opening Test in Galle, a lead of 187 with 91 overs of play left and their bowlers provided the early strikes they needed to reduce Sri Lanka to 32 for five.

"A great effort to push for victory and ultimately come out on the winning side," New Zealand captain Kane Williamson said at the presentation ceremony.

"Naturally when the game starts coming so close, and the light's always a factor here as well this time of the year.

"But it was an outstanding effort from the first innings itself. And then the batters

scored at a rate that allowed us to move the game forward. Deserve to be 1-1."

The Sri Lanka skipper Dimuth Karunaratne blamed his side's batting in the first innings for defeat.

"I think it was a pretty good wicket," he said. "We needed to be patient and put a big score, 240-odd wasn't enough.

"We need some partnerships, we keep losing wickets regularly. That's the key ... once the batters get a start, we need to get a big one."

### SCORES IN BRIEF

**SRI LANKA:** First innings 244 and second innings 122 all out (Mendis 20, Dickwella 51, Karunaratne 21; Boult 2-17, Southee 2-15, Patel 2-31, Somerville 2-49)

**NEW ZEALAND:** First innings 431 for 6 decl (Latham 154, Williamson 20, Taylor 23, Watling 105 not out, De Grandhomme 83, Southee 24 not out; Perera 3-114, Embuldeniya 2-156)

**Result:** New Zealand won by an innings and 65 runs and level two-match series 1-1.

**Player-of-the-match:** Tom Latham

**Player-of-the-series:** BJ Watling

## An EPL invite and G7 banter

Stokes's feat spans all spheres

AGENCIES, Undated



The miraculous chase pulled off by England's Ben Stokes on Sunday not only levelled the Ashes; it also proved that Test cricket at its best pervades all spheres in the countries that follow cricket's oldest format.

And Test cricket was at its best with Stokes penning an outlandish, unbeaten 135, 74 of which came after the ninth England wicket fell with England still 73 runs adrift of the 359 they needed to win the third Test at Headingley.

Six weeks before his Headingley epic, Stokes had won England their maiden World Cup at Lord's, but his Ashes leveller arguably had even more tongues wagging.

It captured the imagination to the extent that India prime minister Narendra Modi broke the news to British premier Boris Johnson on the sidelines of the G7 summit in France on Sunday.

Reuters reported that after Modi told Johnson during a meeting, the British prime minister asked for an iPad to watch the highlights of the Stokes miracle. Yesterday, Johnson met Australian prime minister Scott Morrison on the sidelines of the summit and the Australian had congratulated his British counterpart.

"We're not taking anything for granted," Johnson said, proving that even the usually eccentric prime minister played it safe when it came to the Ashes.

Morrison tempered his well-wishes to Johnson by joking: "Two to go, two to go". Apart from breaching the corridors of power in the G7, Stokes's feat also transcended to another sport and the all-rounder was issued an invitation to play as centre half for Newcastle in the English Premier League.

Newcastle United boss Steve Bruce joked that he was willing to play Stokes, a Newcastle supporter, as a centre half after the England all-rounder's epic century.

Newcastle defeated Tottenham Hotspur 1-0 in the Premier League on the same day for their first win of the season and the 58-year-old said he had spent the final few minutes

before kickoff in London watching Stokes's match-winning knock.

"I don't know what was more nervous. The last 10 minutes of the cricket or this (match). Ben Stokes can play centre half for us next week that's for sure," Bruce said.

"How wonderful it was to watch. [The cricket] was just on. They [Newcastle] had gone for a warm-up and there's nothing you can do then. I usually sit and read the programme.

"But how could I not watch? The kitman was running around ... saying 'we need 27, we've got to put it on'. It was wonderful entertainment, worth watching. It was better than reading the programme, that's for sure."

In the cricket world meanwhile, English and Austrians alike were swooning over Stokes's feat.

All the English newspapers carried a picture of the all-rounder celebrating his winning runs at a sun-bathed Headingley on their front pages, with The Sun splashing "Go Urn My Son!" and the Daily Telegraph "Howzat!".

Former England opener Geoffrey Boycott described Sunday as the best cricketing moment he had witnessed in 50 years. Former Australia captain Ricky Ponting was unsure he had seen 'anything better than that on a Test ground'.

"It was a combination of all sorts of things, craft, skill, versatility and most of all, an 'over my dead body' attitude without which you are not a great player," former England captain Mike Atherton said.

"We can all die happy now -- cricket doesn't get any better than this," wrote Sydney Morning Herald columnist Greg Baum, while The Australian's Gideon Haigh added: "Nobody involved in this Test could feel anything other than honoured to have been part of it."

The Melbourne Herald Sun said Stokes delivered England an "Ashes miracle".

"Ben Stokes began his incredible, match-winning knock a modern-day Geoffrey Boycott, and ended it looking like Adam Gilchrist," it said. "Few Test innings have, or will, match it for guts, glamour and glory."

