

‘We need someone with foresight’

Shakib Al Hasan put in phenomenal individual performances in the 2019 ICC World Cup but ended the tournament disappointed as the team failed to match his standards. The world's foremost allrounder then took a break only to see Bangladesh suffer heavily in Sri Lanka. The Tigers' performance did not much improve when he returned for the one-off Test against Afghanistan, which they lost, and the ensuing T20I tri-series against Afghanistan and Zimbabwe. While there were glimpses of hope in the performances of the A team and the Under-19 side, the senior team's poor run exposed the cracks in Bangladesh cricket and the lack of long-term planning. Since the forlorn World Cup campaign, Shakib has been the only one in the top echelons of Bangladesh cricket speaking frankly about the problems. The premier all-rounder sat down with The Daily Star's Bishwajit Roy and Mazhar Uddin yesterday morning in the lobby of his tranquil residence and spoke regarding many of the issues prevalent in Bangladesh cricket. Known to take action to improve his cricket -- like he did ahead of the World Cup by working exhaustively on his fitness -- Shakib believed that only through well-thought out action can a cricket culture find its true expression. The following are excerpts from the hour-long exclusive interview:

On the challenge in next month's India tour
The India series is more challenging than any other. In T20Is, since it's a short format, there is always a chance, no matter how big or small the teams are. Since 70-80 per cent of the matches are decided in the last three or four deliveries, there is always a chance.

In Tests, it's almost difficult to remember when a team last won a series in India. So that will be a good challenge for us to see how well we do there under these circumstances.

On whether Bangladesh cricket is in transition or going through a bad patch
There was never a transition period since those who have played, have played for a long time now. They played in the World Cup and also after it, so I don't think it can be put down as a transition period.

On Soumya Sarkar and Sabbir Rahman's performance
If we look at their records, it's not bad. Soumya's record in all the formats is not bad. He is among those who have a good average in our team. Scoring 1,000 runs in relatively a small number of matches and also if you look at his average, he is there. Even in bad times, he is among the top two or three run-scorers of Bangladesh.

Bad patches are different for each individual player. Since expectations on an individual can increase at different times, it's difficult for them to deliver.

On standard of domestic cricket
Actually, since I don't play domestic cricket, it's difficult for me to compare the standard now to when I played. Maybe I played one match but I played the match before that five years



PHOTO: KHALID HUSSAIN AYON

opportunity but we couldn't capitalise on our chances. Our team was in very good condition and I feel that we were very strong compared to other teams. We had opportunities but team-wise we couldn't use them. It was a factor whether we believed the kind of objectives we had.

On Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's fitness issues during the World Cup
Rather than fitness, if performance is not up to the mark then that creates anxiety. Fitness won't be an issue if performance is good. One is obviously related to the other; I feel it's more about performance.

Naturally, when you perform yourself, you can inspire others to perform. It becomes very difficult to do that when you don't perform.

On his dream of achieving something big
Every person has a specific goal. If we can win the World Cup once, that will be the ultimate.

On the special BPL, without the involvement of franchises, unlike previous editions
Many cricketers opted out of the Big Bash and signed a BPL agreement. Those players went through a process to do that and naturally they will be disappointed.

Those who encouraged the other players, I don't know if they will do the same now. Personally, I am very frustrated. But the board will do what it feels is right and I am saying this out of frustration.

I feel that it would have been better if the system which was already in place could have been improved upon.

On long-term planning, a topic that has been much discussed in recent times
You have to ask Papon bhai that (smiles)... why are you asking me?

On whether long-term planning exists
I haven't seen it. Actually, we only focus on whatever series we have going on. But if it's something like a World Cup, then maybe we plan six to eight months in advance. Otherwise, we only focus on the ongoing series. It's a cultural thing. People expect that we will win all matches. We plant a tree and crave the fruits the very next day. This is why it's difficult to plan long-term.

The guardians of the country's cricket have a big role to play here. You have to be firm about how you will support the players. A long-term policy maker is needed in this regard. Then a lot of good things will happen. There is a lot to be changed and it's a technical matter. There are points about requirements. It will be good when someone takes these factors into account while planning. For instance, England has [director of cricket] Andrew Strauss, who plans everything. The planning of the last four years is all his. We need someone like that who can plan only regarding cricket, someone with foresight.

On his plans to join politics
Right now, I am with cricket and want it to remain that way. The future will take care of itself. Let the subject remain open. If there is a situation, then why not? No regrets if it doesn't happen. What's going on is nice too.

OFF THE FIELD WITH
SHAKIB AL HASAN

Scan the QR code to see a video of Shakib Al Hasan candidly talking about his food habits, his home life, etc.

ago. If you play one to three matches in eight years, it's difficult to gauge the standard. The ones who can say are those who have played domestic cricket regularly, played all first-class matches every season and also played in international fixtures.

I have never said [during the Afghanistan series] that there is no point in playing [domestic cricket] or never said that one must play. I said that it can vary from player to player. Maybe it's not for everyone but for some it may be suitable.

On infrastructure
I talked about it already... what more can I say

that's new [laughs].

If there is infrastructure, obviously it would be very good. It's not that it will need to be at Dhaka or Mirpur. It's important that they are in various places, especially in divisional grounds.

On the new fitness benchmark in domestic cricket
I don't know... it could even have something to do with me going to the World Cup with good fitness and doing well. It's difficult to say why some things happens at certain times. But obviously it's a good initiative -- the matter of fitness. International cricket right now is at a level where you will have to be fit. You will have to be really fit and we are behind in that aspect. So, I see the initiative as a good one as if you are not fit then there is no chance of doing well. It's not like one is guaranteed to do well with good fitness, but without it there is no chance of doing well.

If the facilities are such that he won't have to travel from, say, Rajshahi to Dhaka to get fit, then obviously it will be very good.

On frustration regarding indoor facilities
In 2009, the indoor facilities were built when [Gazi Ashraf Hossain] Lipu bhai was in charge [of cricket operations] and [AHM Mustafa] Kamal bhai was board president and from

that point the indoor facilities have remained the same, and we know what the problems are but those have not been fixed. There is nothing more to say about this. I can't say the same thing over and over [laughs].

On cricket culture
We never had that culture and it's still not there now. When a coach comes here, the first thing he tries is to change the cricketing culture prevalent here.

But no matter how much he tries, if we don't know about that culture, how can we change it?

People's reaction when they see something that is working, that reaction doesn't occur through words alone. Isn't there a saying in English that action speaks louder than words? This thing is like that. Actually, it depends on action.

On whether board has a definitive policy
Since initiatives have been taken now, I am sure that [long-term] policies will be created. What [BCB president Nazmul Hassan] Papon bhai said a few days ago was that long-term plans are being made. If any such plans are made then obviously Bangladesh cricket will reap the benefits.

On his involvement in the selection process and planning as the Test and T20I captain

No involvement.

On speaking frankly about Bangladesh cricket's problems
That's something you can tell. The main problem with journalists is that you guys know what the matter is. But you won't ever say it. You will hear from someone [a player] and then try to say it through them.

And it's not like you don't know about the subject matter. All you journalists know what is happening behind the scenes and who has what problems and in what areas. At least when it comes to the country's cricket, even if you don't know the whole truth, you guys know 70 or 80 percent. But you never write about them and won't talk about them. What you will do instead is get a player or someone else and say 'bhai, you say it and then I will write'. Why?


It's not that you don't write at all but it's very little and doesn't count.

On BPL's plan for every team to have one leg-spinner
Again, I will have to say that these are actually matters for first-class cricket. You aren't able to play leg-spinners in first-class cricket, so how can you play them in franchise-based cricket?

On World Cup frustration
From the perspective of the team, obviously it's disappointing. I feel that we had a very good

Khulna, Sylhet cruise to wins

SPORTS REPORTER

 Khulna Division and Sylhet Division sealed wins over Rajshahi Division and Dhaka Metropolis while the other two matches, between Dhaka and Rangpur and Chittagong and Barishal, were drawn on the final day of the second round National Cricket League (NCL) matches yesterday.

Khulna's win was widely anticipated as they required just 108 runs on the fourth and final day in chase of a small 123-run target supplied by Rajshahi at the Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium. The hosts eventually registered their first win of the season by seven wickets.

Resuming the day on 15 for one, Soumya Sarkar finally returned among the runs and scored an unbeaten fifty as Khulna reached the target inside the first session to take the lead in the points table in Tier 1.

At the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogura, it was a brilliant comeback from Sylhet to clinch an ultimately comprehensive eight-wicket win over Dhaka Metropolis.

Despite Mahmudullah Riyad's hundred, Dhaka were bundled out for 273 after resuming the day on 225 for six. Sylhet reached the 201-run target behind Imtiaz Hossain's unbeaten century.

Mahmudullah, who was five runs away from his 12th first-class hundred on the third day, reached the feat quickly but since his departure on a 243-ball 111, which included six fours and a six, Dhaka could not pose much of threat.

Sylhet replied positively courtesy of Imtiaz's 11th first-class ton and he remained not out on a 178-ball 110 with eleven fours and a six. Zakir Hasan scored 72 and a rather easy win was sealed in the Tier 2 clash.



IMTIAZ ... 110 not out

At the Zahir Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram, Rangpur were eventually bowled out for 508 after resuming on 334 for five in reply to Dhaka's mammoth first-innings 556.

Centurion Naem Islam added 11 runs to his overnight score and was dismissed for a 324-ball 135 which featured 13 fours and a six. Sohrwardi Shuvo remained unbeaten on 92 while Tanbir Hayder added 73. In their second essay, Dhaka could reach 10 without loss when stumps were drawn.

At the Khan Shaheb Osman Ali Stadium in Fatullah, Barishal survived a close shave against Chittagong to draw the game. Barishal managed to hold on and posted 174 for seven in their second innings in chase of a 336-run target at the Khan Shaheb Osman Ali Stadium.

Resuming the day on 50 for one, Chittagong declared their second innings on 195 for six, with opener Pinak Ghosh scoring a fifty.


In reply, Barishal found themselves in a spot of bother and lost wickets regularly. Mohammad Ashraful made 60 and was the top scorer while Shahriar Nafees added 43 as they somehow managed to negotiate the final day to rescue the game.

Like in the first innings, young off-spinner Nayeem Hasan was instrumental for Chittagong and bagged another four-wicket haul while Noman Chowdhury took two.

SCORES IN BRIEF	
DHAKA V RANGPUR DHAKA: First Innings 556 for 8 declared and 10 RANGPUR: First Innings 508 (Liton 122, Naeem 135, Tanbir 73, Suhrwardi 92 not out, Robiul 34; Sumon 2-92, Saluddin 3-83, Nazmul 3-146) Result: Match drawn.	
RAJSHAHI V KHULNA RAJSHAHI: First Innings 261 and 170. KHULNA: First Innings 309 and 123 for 3 (Soumya 50 not out, Imrul 22, Mithun 27; Shaiful 1-15) Result: Khulna won by 7 wickets.	
CHITTAGONG V BARISHAL CHITTAGONG: 356 and 185 for 6 declared (Pinak 54, Mominul 30, Mahidul 43; Kamrul 42-2) BARISHAL: First Innings 216 and 174 for 7 (Nafees 42, Ashraful 60, Mosaddek 35; Nayeem 4-54, Noman 2-34) Result: Match drawn.	
DHAKA METRO V SYLHET DHAKA METRO: 246 and 273 all out (Mahmudullah 111, Shahidul 42; Jayed 4-49, Imran 2-35) SYLHET: First Innings 319 and 204 for 2 (Imtiaz 110 not out, Zakir 72; Manik 1-25) Result: Sylhet won by 8 wickets.	

SA rocked after Rohit's double ton

AFP, Ranchi

 Rohit Sharma struck his maiden double Test century Sunday to put India on top of the third match against South Africa after the hosts declared on 497 for nine.

Sharma made 212 and was involved in a 267-run fourth wicket partnership with Ajinkya Rahane (115) to pulverise South Africa's bowling in Ranchi.

The tourists were in trouble at nine for two, with Indian fast bowlers sending the opposition openers back to the pavilion in Ranchi.

Zubayr Hamza, on nought, and skipper Faf du Plessis, on one, were at the crease when bad light stopped play for the second successive day.

Pace spearhead Mohammed Shami struck with the second ball of the innings to get the left-handed Dean Elgar caught behind for nought.

Umesh Yadav joined forces to send Quinton de Kock packing for four after the batsman tried to fend off a bouncer that caught his glove and was safely taken by wicketkeeper Wriddhiman Saha.

The day belonged to Sharma who reached 200 with a six off paceman Lungi Ngidi in the third over after lunch, to a standing ovation from the raucous home crowd.

The in-form opener hit another six off Ngidi before falling to Rabada and returned to the pavilion with handshakes from the South African side.

Right now I've played only three Test matches as an opener, so long way to go now. So I'm not reading too much into these three Test matches, of course I'll take a lot of positives from it. But I'm not reading too much into it.

ROHIT SHARMA
INDIA OPENER

PHOTO: AFP

India opener Rohit Sharma celebrates after scoring a double century on the second day of the third Test against South Africa in Ranchi yesterday.

SCORES IN BRIEF
INDIA: First Innings 497 for 9 declared (Sharma 212, Rahane 115, Jadeja 51, Saha 24, Yadav 31; Rabada 3-85, Linde 4-133)
SOUTH AFRICA: First Innings 9 for 2.