



Out of pollution and into the eye of the storm

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI from Rajkot

Out of the frying pan and into the fire. That is pretty much the outlook for the Bangladesh team, who conquered the smog and a strong Indian outfit in Delhi only to find themselves going into a cyclonic storm named Maha, expected to make landfall between Wednesday night and Thursday morning. Despite the ominous storm, Saurashtra Cricket Association secretary Himangshu Saha said that there was not much to be worried about and that everything was progressing as scheduled.

The Bangladesh team, gelling well under Mahmudullah Riyad, were in spirited mood -- sunny skies played a part in that after the gloom in Delhi -- during practice at the Saurashtra Cricket Association Stadium yesterday. The cricketers underwent a light warm-up before proceeding to some fielding exercises with spin consultant Daniel Vettori surprisingly overseeing the session in the presence of head coach Russell Domingo and fielding coach Ryan Cook.

The Tigers had put in a brilliant fielding effort in the first game but the team's think-tank wanted to maintain standards on the field. Vettori put two boards on each side of a chair and angled throws onto them while setting up fielders in a circle to mimic the 30-yard inner ring. The ball ran amok through the ground after impact with the boards and kept the fielders on their toes.

Following the fielding workout, the players left for net sessions. When this reporter left to watch the net session, he found that the pace battery of Mustafizur Rahman, Abu Hider, Al-Amin Hossain and Shaiful Islam were following bowling coach Charles Langeveldt out of the net area, apparently skipping the session.

On passing the reporters, Langeveldt was posed a question about what Rajkot was like. "Out of the pollution," he smiled. When reminded about the oncoming cyclone, he laughed and said: "Oh, now the cyclone."

Mustafizur proceeded to joke with a Bangladeshi reporter before poking him in his ample midriff.

The small army of pacers gathered along with Langeveldt in the ground and bowled for a while on one of the centre wickets. Overall, the Tigers were relaxed.

"The environment is pretty good in the dressing room



Having impressed in the first T20I in New Delhi, (from L to R) Bangladesh youngsters Aminul Islam, Mohammad Naim and Afif Hossain honed their craft at the Saurashtra Cricket Association Stadium in Rajkot yesterday, ahead of tomorrow's second T20I against India.

PHOTO: BCB

and we are preparing for the next match," Afif Hossain said in a press conference yesterday. Mahmudullah had transformed his team pretty well, following weeks of upheaval in Bangladesh cricket. Asked about their electric fielding and the captain's message, Afif informed: "Captain's message was that 'do what you are doing best' and 'we play as a unit'."

Mahmudullah had led the way with his own body language on the field.

"It was our plan to be aggressive on the field," Afif

remarked. The Tigers had talked about a fearless approach and Afif once again reiterated that despite winning the first T20I, they were not thinking of winning the series. A level of maturity was shown in the last T20I that is not usually associated with the Tigers' T20I play. Afif once again remarked that the Tigers were taking things slow.

"We're not planning on winning or losing the series yet, we are just focusing on what we have to do. We can only perform at our best and after that whatever happens will happen," Afif remarked.

'It's going to be jam-packed'

Rajkot readies huge welcome for Tigers

SPORTS REPORTER from Rajkot

The facilities provided to Bangladesh cricketers, especially the ones who are not centered in Dhaka, have been a topic of interest since the recent players' strike. District players who need to undergo fitness and conditioning exercises often have no place other than Mirpur where they can find such facilities.

It is a well-known fact that if you can provide the facilities, promising cricketers will thrive and Rajkot's Saurashtra Cricket Association Stadium is one such ground in India where the facilities provided are top-class despite the ground hosting very little international cricket since its inception.

Located in the clean and fairly simple city of Rajkot, the stadium has hosted only six international matches -- two Tests, two ODIs and two T20Is -- and has a media box in the mould of the famous Lord's in England.

With the second T20I between Bangladesh and India scheduled for November 7, the ground staff's first responsibility will be to counter the effect of the impending cyclonic storm, Maha, which will reportedly bring extremely heavy rainfall to Saurashtra and Gujarat over the next few days.

Saurashtra Cricket Association (SCA) secretary Himangshu Saha told reporters: "Recent reports say that it's going to subside. And we are very hopeful... because now the observation says that it's going to be in the morning



PHOTO: EKUSH TAPADAR

The Saurashtra Cricket Association Stadium in Rajkot is expected to host a full-house crowd when Bangladesh square off against India in the second T20I on Thursday.

hours... if there's any morning shower then it won't be a problem.

"If there's any crazy rain there then we can't say that. But earlier in 2013 between India and Australia, we had some rain till 3:34pm but there was no problem. The drainage system is absolutely fantastic."

The Stadium hosts one of the biggest net facilities in India with 28 net wickets for practice. For good measure they also have 12 centre wickets. While the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has a hard time maintaining the grounds across the country, Saha informed that agencies were used for the housekeeping of the venue, which has been functional since 2013.

"We have agencies for housekeeping and permanent ground staff and everything, so about 150-200 people," Himanshu informed.

However, the Stadium does see a lot of cricket despite the dearth of international fixtures in Rajkot. "Basically, we have a long domestic season. We have many domestic matches being played here. We have three or four grounds in Rajkot. I would say about 200 days this ground is busy."

The Association was excited to host Bangladesh for the first time and they were expecting a capacity crowd on Thursday. "This is the first time Bangladesh is coming to play here in Rajkot, so there's good excitement among the association and also spectators. We have got a very good response in selling tickets. It's going to be jam-packed."

With a flat batting track on offer, the crowd will be expecting a good show come Thursday.

BD U-19s draw again

SPORTS REPORTER

After drawing the first Youth Test, the second and the final game of the series between Bangladesh Under-19 and their Sri Lankan counterparts ended in the same fashion at the Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium in Khulna yesterday.

Starting the day on 187 for five with a 17-run lead, Sri Lanka declared on 346 for nine in 149 overs. In reply, Bangladesh managed to score 37 for the loss of three wickets in pursuit of the 177-run target in the remaining 14 overs on the day before stumps were drawn.

Overnight batsman Nipun Dananjaya strung a 68-run stand with Lakshan Gamage for the sixth-wicket before sharing a 82-run seventh-wicket stand with Dulith Wellalage. While both Wellalage and Gamage were dismissed after scoring 45 runs each, it was Nipun, the skipper, who scored a patient 318-ball 81 to ensure Sri Lanka piled up a decent score before declaring.

Ashraful Islam was the pick of the bowlers for Bangladesh as the off-spinner picked up three wickets for 76 runs.

Following the exchange, a team-high 18 came from opener Sajid Hossain, who was unbeaten after 46 balls.

Bangladesh will play the first of their five-match Youth ODI series against Sri Lanka on November 9 in Khulna.

SPORTS REPORTER from Rajkot



India have so many talents that one would not contemplate finding an age-level cricketer looking up to a cricketer from Bangladesh, but Saurashtra Cricket Association's U-23 women's team captain Riddhi Ruparel is one such example as she wants to mould her game after Bangladesh wicketkeeper-batsman Mushfiqur Rahim.

The women's U-23 were present at the ground to watch the Bangladesh team's practice at Rajkot's Saurashtra Cricket Stadium and Riddhi was waiting by the sidelines watching her favourite cricketer closely.

Just like Mushfiqur, she is also a wicketkeeper-batsman and bats in the top order. The similarities between the two only begin there.

"I have been following him for two years. Last time I went to Bangladesh I wanted to meet him and Shakib Al Hasan but they were in some of the tournaments so I wasn't able to meet them. I represented Kalabagan [Kriya Chakra] in Bangladesh's league," Riddhi said.

Mushfiqur's fantastic knock lifted Bangladesh

'He is my idol'



through the gloom of the last couple of weeks and handed the Tigers their first T20I victory against India and Riddhi beamed about her idol while talking to reporters.

"I idolise him because I am a wicketkeeper and a top-order batsman so the way he played in the last game made me feel like I could also play like that. Initially, he took time but suddenly he changed the game. Even after the catch was dropped, he was positive in his approach. He said 'I will make my team win'. I idolise him and also want to play like him."

When questioned how Mushfiqur had

garnered her adoration, Riddhi said: "I think he is the smallest in international cricket and I am the smallest in domestic cricket. Height doesn't matter because even short players can make the team win."

It naturally piqued reporters' interests that a young Indian cricketer would idolise Mushy when her country's cricket has produced so many superstars.

"I idolise him and also Indian cricketers like [MS] Dhoni, but their game is totally different [to mine] so I idolise Mushfiqur because he has a similar game to mine. Initially, he takes his time in batting but then he plays so well late on. I feel I should also play like him," the small-statured cricketer said.

The spirited cricketer's comments led to a discussion and Mushfiqur was finally approached by a BCCI personnel who arranged for Riddhi to meet her idol. The shy but captivated Riddhi smiled from ear to ear when meeting her idol and Mushfiqur was impressed when he heard that his fan was representing the national U-23 side. The right-hander agreed to a photo with his young fan. "Good luck," Mushy told her before leaving for the dressing room.



Bangladesh opener Imrul Kayes and other members of the Test squad practised with the pink ball in Mirpur yesterday, to prepare for their first day-night Test in India from November 22.

PHOTO: FERAZ AHMED

Khulna scrape; Dhaka cruise

SPORTS REPORTER



It was a scintillating fourth and final day of the fourth round of the National Cricket League as Khulna Division and Dhaka Division sealed victory over Rangpur Division and Rajshahi Division respectively yesterday.

At the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur Khulna resumed the day on 130 for five, needing 73 more runs to win. Overnight batsmen Mahedi Hasan and Ziaur Rahman started the day cautiously and both reached fifties as the chase started to look like a simple one for Khulna, who reached 177 for five, just 26 runs adrift of the target.

But Rangpur's left-arm spinner Sohrawardi Shuvo had other ideas. He removed Mahedi for 56 to break the 109-run sixth-wicket stand and made it a double blow by removing Ziaur for 53 in his next over. 184 for seven became 187 for nine as off-spinner Mahmudul Hasan dispatched Abdur Razzak and Rubel Hossain in successive deliveries.

Moinul Islam and Abdul Hamid then came together and navigated tense waters as took Khulna home with an unbeaten 16-run stand, keeping Khulna on top of the Tier 1 points table with two wins in four games.

Shuvo ended up with the figures of six for 55 from 18.4 overs, but his

SCORES IN BRIEF

RANGPUR V KHULNA
RANGPUR: First innings 224 and second innings 211
KHULNA: First innings 233 and second innings 203 for 9 (Imran 25, Anamul 30, Mahedi 56, Ziaur 53; Sohrawardi 6-55, Mahmudul 2-15)
Result: Khulna Div won by 1 wicket.

RAJSHAHI V DHAKA DIVISION
RAJSHAHI: First innings 230 and second innings 241 all out (Junaid 41, Najmul 51, Farhad 28, Sabir 58; Salaudinn 2-45, Nazmul 3-58, Saif 3-15)
DHAKA DIV: First innings 475 for 7 declared.
Result: Dhaka Div won by an innings and 4 runs.

22nd first-class five-wicket haul was not enough to lift Rangpur from the bottom of the table as they are yet to register a win in four games.

In Cox's Bazar, Dhaka clinched a convincing innings and four run win over defending champion Rajshahi.

Rajshahi started the day on 77 for three, needing 168 more runs to make Dhaka bat again. Their chances of doing that took a hit immediately as left-arm spinner Najmul Islam removed overnight batsman Junaid Siddiqui without any addition to his previous day's score of 41.

Taibur Rahman then removed Nazmul Hossain Shanto for 51 before Saif Hasan, the batsman who was included in the Bangladesh Test squad for the two-Test series in India, displayed his off-spin ability.

Saif first removed Sabbir Rahman leg-before for the team top score of

58 off 102 balls, which included three sixes and as many boundaries, and followed it up by dismissing Muktar Ali for 11.

Saif went on to pick up his third wicket, that of Forhad Reza, and notched his best figures in first-class cricket of three for 15 from 6.2 overs. Rajshahi were eventually bundled out for 241 runs shortly after the lunch break.

Earlier, Rajshahi were all out for 230 in their first innings and Dhaka replied with a mammoth 475 for five, riding on three hundreds from player-of-the-match Shuvagata Hom, Taibur and skipper Nadif Chowdhury.

With one win, two loss and a draw Rajshahi are struggling in third



SOHRAWARDI ... 6 for 55

position in the Tier 1 table with 13.16 points. Dhaka, on the other hand, registered their first win of the league and are in second place behind Khulna with 20.6 points.

On Monday, Tier 2 sides Sylhet and Dhaka Metropolis registered wins over Barishal and Chattogram respectively on the third day of the round.

IPL players' auction shifts to Kolkata

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA from New Delhi

The players' auction for the next edition of the Indian Premier League (IPL) will be held in Kolkata for the first time on December 19. The decision was made at the tournament's Governing Council meeting held yesterday.

"The IPL auction will be in Kolkata on December 19. It's a departure from the traditional venue 'Bengaluru,'" said an IPL Governing Council member.

While the franchises were allotted Rs 82 crore each for IPL 2019, Rs 85 crore per team has been earmarked for the 2020 season.

Every franchise will also have an additional purse of Rs 3 crore in addition to the balance in their kitties from the last auction.

Delhi Capitals have the biggest balance -- Rs 8.2 crore, followed by Rajasthan Royals at Rs 7.15 crore. This year's auction is the last one before the franchises disband and prepare to assemble fresh squads from 2021 at a mega auction.

Sublime Smith steers Aus

AFP, Canberra



Master batsman Steve Smith stroked a faultless unbeaten 80 as Australia edged Pakistan by seven wickets in Canberra to go 1-0 up in their three-match Twenty20 series.

Top-ranked Pakistan set a competitive 150 for six off their 20 overs, with skipper Babar Azam hitting his second consecutive half-century and Iftekhar Ahmed clubbing a quickfire 62.

But their bowling attack was no match for Smith, who brought up his fourth 50 in the short format off 36 balls, with six fours and one big six, as Australia reached 151 for three with nine balls to spare.

It put them 1-0 up after the opening match in Sydney on Sunday was abandoned due to rain. The final game is in Perth on Friday.

"Very pleasing. I thought we were pretty good all day," said skipper Aaron Finch.

"To get wickets consistently was key. Everyone is playing their roles really well, and we've got guys like Steve, who does what he does best."

SCORES IN BRIEF
PAKISTAN: 150 for 6 in 30 overs (Azam 50, Iftekhar 62 not out; Agar 2-23)
AUSTRALIA: 151 for 3 in 18.3 overs (Warner 20, Smith 80 not out, McDermott 21; Irfan 1-27)

Result: Australia won by seven wickets.
Player-of-the-match: Steve Smith.