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Four members of the Bangladesh football team share a joke at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport yesterday, prior to their departure for the South Asian Games in Nepal. PHOTO: COLLECTED

Jibon sets sights on gold

SPORTS REPORTER

National football team's striker Nabib Newaj Jibon believes recent good performance against big teams in World Cup qualifiers will boost their confidence ahead of the South Asian (SA) Games, starting in Nepal from December 1.

"We have really put up good performances against big opponents during the World Cup qualifiers. We are going to compete in the SA Games against teams who are equal to us in strength, so the recent-past performances will definitely boost our confidence. If we can carry those performance to the Games, it is possible to produce good results, even secure gold medal," Jibon told The Daily Star on the eve of the team's departure for Nepal yesterday.

Bangladesh, who won gold medal in the regional games in 1999 and 2010, bagged bronze medal in the last edition in India three years ago.

Bangladesh are believed to be one of the gold-medal contenders alongside holders Nepal with Maldives, Bhutan and Sri Lanka the other teams in the competition. Bangladesh team features 16 senior team players, out of whom nine players – Yeasin Khan, Rahmat Mia, Riyadul Hasan, Biswanth Gosh, Jamal Bhuiyan, Biplu Ahmed, Saad Uddin, Mohammad Ibrahim and Jibon -- are regular members of the starting-eleven of the senior side while Tutul Hossain Badsha and Rabiul Hasan have often been used in the starting eleven too.

Bangladesh, who won gold medal in the regional games in 1999 and 2010, bagged bronze medal in the last edition in India three years ago.

"If you compare with the squad from the 2016 edition, the current side is better in both technique and tactic and this side has been showing consistency under the guidance of Jamie Day. But to be honest, the coach in 2016 was not good and we conceded goals due to silly mistakes.

"Besides, we went to the SA Games in India on the back of some disappointing performances in the Russia World Cup qualifiers where we conceded four to five goals in each match and we were mentally down. But this time, we have been performing better in World Cup qualifying matches and we are mentally boosted," said Jibon, who believes three days' preparation will not be an issue as the players have good understanding and they know the coach's playing style very well.

The 29-year-old striker scored three goals in the previous edition, but this time the Abahani striker is not willing to set himself any target so that he can play without pressure.

'Mustafizur wants to get better'

SPORTS REPORTER

After a continuation of his lean patch in Bangladesh's recently concluded tour of India, ace left-arm paceman Mustafizur Rahman has already started to practise at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday with the aim of regaining his rhythm.

Bangladesh pacers were made to look largely ineffective in the Indore and Kolkata Tests, while the Indian pace trio of Ishant Sharma, Umesh Yadav and Mohammad Shami dominated and at times seemed unplayable to the Bangladesh batsmen, who lacked the technical ability to negotiate a fast bowling unit swinging the ball at pace.

Mustafizur, who is considered to be one of the top pacers in the country, had unimpressive returns in the three T20Is and was dropped for both Tests. The 24-year-old did not even make the cut in the pink-ball Test in Kolkata, a match where the Tigers fielded three pacers -- Al Amin Hossain, Ebadot Hossain and Abu Jayed -- because the fixture was expected to aid the pacers due to the extra movement that the pink ball offers.

CHAMPAKA RAMANAYAKE

Mustafizur, who is not in the list of players who will represent Bangladesh in the upcoming SA Games in December, practised in Mirpur yesterday under the guidance of High Performance bowling coach Champaka Ramanayake.

"No [he is not included in the Bangladesh Under-23 team for SA Games]. He comes and works with me. And he wants to get better so I am helping him. He wants to bowl, so I said 'come and bowl at us'," Champaka told reporters in Mirpur yesterday.

The Sri Lankan pointed out where Mustafizur has been lacking recently.

"I think he has a bit of a rhythm issue. But he is working on it. He did not bowl the right length [in the India tour]. He understands that. Everybody sometimes goes through bad patches and if they realise it early, they can recover." said Champaka.

He also believed that even though Mustafizur has not been 100 per cent in his skills level, he will be able to bounce back soon.

"I have not really worked with him for long. I am just looking at him. I am pretty sure he will get back as he has done so a lot of times. He is a smart boy. He was not 100 per cent in his skills level but I am pretty sure he is working towards that."

I saw Gayle's signature, says Nizamuddin

SPORTS REPORTER

After West Indies superstar Chris Gayle had claimed that he did not even know that he was in the reckoning for the BPL this season, Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury said yesterday that the Jamaican's signature was on the document provided to the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL).

Gayle seemed to be surprised that he was picked by BPL side Chattogram Challengers for the upcoming seventh edition and, speaking after finishing his stint with Jozi Stars in South African T20 league Mzansi Super League on November 24, expressed surprise that he was picked in the BPL draft.

Gayle said that he would take a break from cricket, which would include missing Australia's Big Bash League and West Indies' ODI tour of India in December.

"I am not going to the Big Bash. I'm not sure what cricket will come up. I don't even know how my name reached the BPL, but I have been drafted in a team and I don't even know how that happened," Gayle told the media after the Stars' loss to Tshwane Spartans.

Initially, the news had created confusion in the BCB and the Challengers camp, but Nizamuddin said that the document Gayle's agent provided to the BPL governing council was signed by the 40-year-old.

"We follow a certain procedure before putting a player's name on the draft list," Chowdhury told The Daily Star after looking into the document. "The case was the same with Gayle. The document we were given by his agent contained his [Gayle's] signature. After you asked me about it, I inspected the document."

Chattogram Challengers team director and BCB director Jalal Yunus informed The Daily Star that after picking Gayle in the November 16 players' draft, the team had even held negotiations with him.

During the BPL players' draft on November 16, upon getting the chance through a lottery to pick the first player, Chattogram Challengers had scooped up Gayle.

"We picked Gayle at the first opportunity. All our plans were made with him in mind. Now, if he doesn't come, we will be in big trouble. After picking him we held discussions with him about payment. But we have not heard from him for the last few days. Now we hear this... I don't know where the problem lies," Yunus said.

This is the latest in a series of turmoil surrounding this year's BPL. In August, after a disagreement with the franchises that had been a part of the first six editions, the BCB had decided to stage the tournament on their own steam, without the involvement of the franchises.

BCB President Nazmul Hassan had also announced that the upcoming edition would be titled the Bangabandhu BPL in celebration of the 100th birth anniversary of Father of the Nation Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

7-star Cornwall steamrolls Afghanistan

AFP, *Lucknow*

Rahkeem Cornwall, the heaviest man in Test cricket, took seven wickets as West Indies skittled out Afghanistan for 187 on the first day of their one-off Test on Wednesday.

West Indies reached 68-2 at the end of the day, further boosting captain Jason Holder's decision to send Afghanistan in to bat at their "home" ground in the Indian city of Lucknow which was engulfed in dangerous levels of air pollution.

The 26-year-old Cornwall, who hits about 140 kilograms (308 pounds) on the scales and is 1.96 metres (six feet five inches) tall, packed a heavyweight punch with his off-spin.

"I was just looking to put the ball in the right areas. Just try to stay as balanced as possible," Cornwall said at the end of the day in which his seven for 75 haul was the best for a West Indies spinner in nearly five decades.

Ibrahim Zadran was the first to fall with the score on 28, caught by Holder for 17 at leg slip attempting a sweep off Cornwall.

Javed Ahmadi made 39, including a six and five fours, before he was caught by Shamarh Brooks at deep long-off from a Jomel Warrican delivery with the score on 84.

Ihsanullah became Cornwall's second victim when he edged a forward prod to Shai Hope at slip to be out for 24 just before lunch.

Afghanistan struggled to generate momentum after the break, with Cornwall claiming three more victims as Rahmat Shah and Asghar Afghan managed just four runs and Nasir Jamal two.

Afsar Zazai fared better, reaching 32 before Cornwall grabbed his sixth wicket in the last ball before tea and his seventh when Yamin Ahmadzai fell for 18.

West Indies' generously built off-spinner Rahkeem Cornwall took seven for 75 in just his second Test to help bowl out Afghanistan for 185 on the first day of the one-off Test in Lucknow yesterday. PHOTO: TWITTER

Afghanistan's spinners struck early when Amir Hamza and Rashid Khan picked up Kraigg Brathwaite and Shai Hope, before John Campbell and Shamarh Brooks steadied the ship.

Afghanistan, who were awarded Test status in 2017, picked two debutants in their starting eleven -- middle-order batsman Nasir Jamal and left-arm spinner Amir Hamza.

The Afghans claimed their maiden Test victory in March when they beat fellow newcomers Ireland before defeating Bangladesh in September.

SCORES IN BRIEF

AFGHANISTAN: First innings 187 all out (Javed 39, Ihsanullah 24, Zazai 32, Amir 34; Holder 2-22, Cornwall 7-75)

WEST INDIES: First innings 68 for 2 (Campbell 30 not out, Brooks 19 not out)

SHORT CORNER

Murali set to play a different innings

Sri Lankan spin legend Muttiah Muralitharan is set to play a different innings as governor of the country's Tamil-dominated Northern Province after President Gotabaya Rajapaksa "personally invited" him to accept the post, a media report said on Wednesday.

The 47-year-old ace spinner, the record holder for highest wickets in Test cricket (800), is among the three new governors tipped to be appointed by Gotabaya Rajapaksa, who registered a thumping victory in the November 16 presidential election.

"President Gotabaya Rajapakse had personally invited Muralidharan to accept the post of the Governor of the Northern Province," the Daily Mirror quoted Presidential Secretariat sources as saying.

-- PTI

Bailey named selector

Former Australia Twenty20 captain George Bailey was appointed Wednesday as one of the country's three national selectors, replacing the retired Greg Chappell.

He joins chairman Trevor Hohns and coach Justin Langer and draws the curtain on his long playing career after the domestic Big Bash League in early February to take on the role full-time.

"I have been fortunate enough to contribute as a player for quite a few years, and to now have the opportunity to continue in the role of selector is a tremendous honour," said Bailey.

"I'm confident I can add value to the selection process and that my experience will be complementary to that of Trevor and Justin."

-- AFP

Dhawan out of WI T20Is

India's opening batsman Shikhar Dhawan has been ruled out of the upcoming T20I series against West Indies, the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) said on Wednesday.

Dhawan, who suffered a deep cut on his left knee during a Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy domestic competition game against Maharashtra in Surat, has been replaced by Sanju Samson.

The BCCI medical team assessed Dhawan on Tuesday to review the healing of his wound and suggested that he needs some more time for his stitches to come off and his wound to heal completely, BCCI Secretary Jay Shah said in a statement.

The senior selection committee named Sanju Samson as Dhawan's replacement for the T20I series.

SAHA'S SUCCESSFUL SURGERY

India's Test wicketkeeper Wriddhiman Saha underwent a "successful" surgery for a fracture he sustained on his right-hand finger during the day/night Test against Bangladesh in Kolkata last week.

--PALLAB BHATTACHARYA

Silverwood to fly home early

England coach Chris Silverwood will leave his team's tour of New Zealand early because of a family bereavement, officials said Wednesday.

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) said Silverwood would depart on Saturday after day two of the second Test in Hamilton.

"Assistant coaches Graham Thorpe and Paul Collingwood will assume responsibility of team affairs alongside Test captain Joe Root for the remainder of the New Zealand tour," it tweeted.

The New Zealand tour is Silverwood's first in charge of England after he was named as Trevor Bayliss's replacement in October.

-- AFP

Saif on the way back

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh opener Saif Hassan, who was stuck in Kolkata because his Indian visa had expired, was expected to reach Dhaka yesterday night along with a few other teammates.

Saif's six-month visa had expired on November 24, the date the second Test between Bangladesh and India ended.

He had gone to the airport with the rest of his teammates the following day and it was then that it was discovered that his visa had expired the previous day. Efforts were being made from the Bangladesh High Commission in India to extend his visa so that he could return to Bangladesh.

The issue was then remedied and the opener was supposed to return to the country yesterday night alongside Liton Das, Mehedi Hasan Miraz and Taijul Islam. However, Imrul Kayes and Mushfiqur Rahim stayed back in India and will return a few days later.