



In the post-Mashrafe period, youngsters like Hasan Mahmud and Shoriful Islam will lead the pace attack for Bangladesh. Both of them, along with all-rounder Mahedi Hasan, were included in the 18-man squad for the ODIs against West Indies. (Bottom) Batting stalwarts like Tamim Iqbal and Shakib Al Hasan got runs in the second practice match of the team at BKSP yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR FILE/BCB

Zahir equals another 400m record

SPORTS REPORTER



Promising sprinter Zahir Rayhan equalled a hand-timer record in the 400m race of the Bangabandhu 44th National Athletics Championships yesterday exactly two years after he broke a 32-year-old electronic-timer record in the same event of the same championship.

Zahir took 47.20 seconds (hand-timer) to run 400m at the Bangabandhu National Stadium, equalling a record set 30 years ago by Mehdi Hasan of BJMC at the Army Stadium in Banani during the National Athletics Championships in 1991.

The 21-year-old sprinter made an electronic-timer record in 400m event of the 2019 National Championships with a time of 46.86 seconds to eclipse the time of 47.55 seconds set by Milzar Hossain in the Asian Games in 1986.

Zahir was seen as the clear favourite yesterday and that was reflected at the end of the sprint, with second-placed Ashrafuzzaman clocking in at 48.60 seconds and third-placed Moin Uddin taking 49.60 seconds.

After missing out in the final of the 400m event of the last South Asian Games in Nepal due to respiratory problems, Zahir wanted to better his time despite the limitations on training levied by the Covid-19 pandemic.

"We have been determined to produce a good time. I could not train well amid the pandemic but I tried to train with the help of the Bangladesh Navy and Bangladesh Athletics Federation," said the former BKSP student, who ran with a blue sprint suit for the first time.

"The SA Games are a big regret for me because I could not participate in the final of the 400m, an event I was supposed to win. So my target was to do better at home ahead of the Bangladesh Games and Olympic Games, because it is my childhood dream to participate," said Zahir. "After the SA Games, I set a new target to win a 400m medal in the Asian Games."

"If I can finish within 45 seconds, I can win a medal in the Asian Games, but I need advanced training abroad along with world-class athletes because my friends overseas are improving their time through training programmes in the USA and Jamaica. They are now taking 45 to 46 seconds but they once took the same time I am now producing," Zahir said.

Meanwhile, Sumi Akter tumbled just two steps before the finish line in the 3000m event, allowing Rinki Biswas of Bangladesh Army to clock in first and produce a national record with a time of 10:43.30. The previous best time belonged to Halima Khan, who held the 3000m record for the last 17 years by 11:8.15 in 2003.



Zahir Rayhan ambled his way to matching a 30-year-old record in his favourite 400m dash during second day of the Bangabandhu 44th National Athletics Championships at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Uncapped trio exemplify long-term planning

SPORTS REPORTER

With the inclusion of three uncapped cricketers in the form of pacers Hasan Mahmud and Shoriful Islam and off spinning all-rounder Mahedi Hasan in the 18 member ODI squad, the selectors have taken the first steps towards a long-term plan.

The upcoming home series against the West Indies, starting from January 20, will also see the return of all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, who was included in the team after completing a one-year ban from all cricketing activities imposed by the ICC for failing to report corrupt approaches from a bookie.

With nine batsmen, five seamers, two left-arm spinners and two off-spinners in the squad, Minhajul Abedin opined that the 18-member squad had all the variety and combination that would be needed to form the best possible side for the series.

"Considering everything, I think we have stepped into the first stage of our planning with the upcoming series. I hope we will be able to play positive cricket and get going. We have kept the 2023 ICC World Cup in mind but we are thinking series by series. As we got West Indies on home



soil, we want to begin our journey on a positive note.

"It will be a fresh start as we had a long break from international cricket. We have to start from scratch. In that context, there will be some pressure on the players and they have to accept that. With a mixture of youth and experience, I think we have a good side overall," Minhajul told the media yesterday.

There were several changes to the squad that was part of Bangladesh's last international assignment against Zimbabwe last year. Former ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, pacers Shaiful Islam and Al Amin Hossain and opener Naim Sheikh missed out while Taskin Ahmed and Rubel Hossain returned.

The three-match ODI series against the West Indies will also be Tamim

the left-hander struck fifty in the second match for Mahmudullah XI yesterday.

Shakib also returned to the groove and scored 52 off 82 balls as Mahmudullah XI posted 223 for seven in 45 overs.

Among the three uncapped cricketers, Mahmud and Mahedi have already made their T20I debuts while young left-arm seamer Shoriful got a maiden call-up since impressing during Bangladesh's triumphant ICC Under-19 World

BANGLADESH ODI SQUAD

Tamim Iqbal (C), Shakib Al Hasan, Najmul Hossain Shanto, Mushfiqur Rahim, Mohammad Mitthun, Liton Das, Mahmudullah Riyad, Afif Hossain, Soumya Sarkar, Taskin Ahmed, Rubel Hossain, Tajjul Islam, Mustafizur Rahman, Mehidy Hassan Miraz, Saif Uddin, Mahedi Hasan, Hasan Mahmud, Shoriful Islam

Cup campaign last year.

Both young pacers Shoriful and Mahmud were rewarded for recent performances but the latter was also considered for his sheer pace and movement.

Off-spinning all-rounder Mahedi has been a prolific performer in the domestic circuit, with the ability to bowl with the new ball can and also use the long handle of the bat if needed.

Lanka dig in after Root's double ton

REUTERS, UnDATED

England captain Joe Root scored a double-century, but Sri Lanka began a spirited fight-back to close day three of the first Test in Galle on 156 for two in their second innings, trailing the visitors by 130 runs.

Opener Lahiru Thirimanne anchored the Sri Lanka innings with an unbeaten 76 and will resume on Sunday morning with nightwatchman Lasith Embuldeniya, who has yet to score.

It was a vastly improved effort on the home side's first innings score of 135, as they chase down England's first innings total of 421.

Kusal Perera (62) was the first wicket to fall, caught at deep point by Jack Leach after trying to launch seamer Sam Curran to the boundary. Spinner Leach then had the out-of-form Kusal Mendis caught by wicketkeeper Jos Buttler for 15 shortly before bad light took the players from the field.

Root will be disappointed his side did not make further inroads on a turning wicket, but it was still a memorable day for him as he brought up his fourth Test double-ton with a score of 228. He also became the seventh English batsman to pass 8,000 Test runs but was the last man out, caught on the mid-on boundary off spinner Dilruwan Perera (4-109), whose excellent performance on the third morning kept England somewhat in check.

England resumed the third morning on 320 for four as Root and Buttler (30) scored 52 runs in quick time before Sri Lanka received a bit of luck.



Gavaskar slams Rohit



AGENCIES

As Rohit Sharma gifted his wicket on day two of the ongoing fourth Test against Australia at Brisbane, former skipper Sunil Gavaskar did not hold back on his criticism and said that there is no excuse for Rohit to be playing that kind of shot.

Rohit played a knock of 44 runs in the first innings of the fourth Test, but in trying to hit a six, Rohit ended up gifting his wicket to off-spinner Nathan Lyon.

"Why? Why? Why? That is an unbelievable shot. That's an irresponsible shot. There is a fielder at long-on, there is a fielder there at deep square leg. You

have just hit a boundary a couple of balls earlier, why would you play that shot? You are a senior player, there is no excuse, absolutely no excuse for that shot. An unnecessary wicket, gifted away. Total unnecessary," said Gavaskar while commenting for Channel 7.

In trying to be positive, Rohit chipped the ball to deepish mid-on and as a result, he was sent back to the pavilion.

At the end of the rain-curtailed day's play, India were 62 for two, still trailing the hosts by 307 runs. Cheteshwar Pujara and Ajinkya Rahane were unbeaten on eight and two respectively.

Earlier, Shardul Thakur and Washington Sundar took six wickets among themselves as India bundled out Australia for 369.

Ole vs Klopp at the top

AFP, London

Liverpool and Manchester United face off on Sunday as the Premier League's top two teams for the first time since 1997 -- with the rivalry between England's most successful clubs rekindled by a fascinating title race.

United top the table after the New Year for the first time since Alex Ferguson's retirement in 2013 thanks to an 11-match unbeaten run to take them past Jurgen Klopp's men.

Liverpool have surrendered top spot after three league games without a win and could drop to fifth place on Sunday if results go against them.

The last time United and Liverpool locked horns in a title race was 12 years ago. Back then United were hardened winners under Ferguson, who saw off Rafael Benitez's challengers to win a third consecutive league title.



Now it is United who Ole Gunnar Solskjaer admits are the "hunters" chasing the champions.

Ferguson, who arrived at Old Trafford in 1986 with United firmly in Liverpool's shadow, once famously said his goal was to knock them "off their perch" and he went on to win 13 league titles.

But United have been displaced as top dogs even in their own city by Manchester City. And fans have been forced to watch Klopp spearhead another era of glory at Anfield, winning the Champions

League in 2019 before ending the club's 30-year wait for a league title last season -- putting them just one behind United's record tally of 20.

But, in a strange and at times soulless season in empty stadiums, the relentless consistency shown by Liverpool in recent years has dropped off. Hampered by a series of injuries, most notably to talismanic centre-back Virgil van Dijk, Liverpool have already dropped more points in 17 games than they have in either of the past two seasons.

Saif held by Rahmatganj

SPORTS REPORTER

Federation Cup runners-up Saif Sporting Club stuttered to a 1-1 draw against Rahmatganj MFS in their opening match of the Bangladesh Premier League in a fast-paced game at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

John O'koli gave Saif an 18th-minute lead with a powerful shot which took a deflection off Rahmatganj defender Khalil Rahman before Christ Remi volleyed home from inside the box to level the margin for Rahmatganj in the 40th minute.

Saif goalkeeper Pappu Hossain denied Remi from the spot in the 56th minute as the two sides left the field with a share of the spoils.

Zia unbeaten champion

SPORTS REPORTER

Grand Master Ziaur Rahman became unbeaten champion in the Mujib Birth Centenary Invitational FIDE Rating Chess Tournament after playing out a draw against FM Mehdi Hasan Parag in the final round at the Bangladesh Chess Federation Hall Room yesterday.

Zia secured 7.5 points from nine outings to finish top among 44 participants in the six-day competition. Anata Chowdhury became second with seven points while Parag finished third with 6.5 points.