



Bangladesh T20I captain Mahmudullah Riyad and ODI captain Tamim Iqbal arrive at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport yesterday ahead of their departure for New Zealand. The Tigers are slated to play three ODIs and as many T20Is in a country where they have not won a single international match in their cricketing history.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

‘We will try to change the record’

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh's last New Zealand sojourn was a tragic and shocking experience as they survived the horrific Christchurch mosque shootings in March 2019. This time around, the Tigers will travel to New Zealand faced with the challenge of touring abroad for the first time since the pandemic.

A 35-member Bangladesh contingent is scheduled to land in Christchurch today with the primary target of winning their first international game in the country. However, expectations of the Tigers are low due to a lack of preparations ahead of the tough tour.

Bangladesh are scheduled to play three ODIs, starting from March 20 in Dunedin. The next

two games are scheduled for March 23 and 26 in Christchurch and Wellington respectively.

The visitors will then take part in the first T20I on March 28 in Hamilton before the second and third T20Is are played in Napier and Auckland on March 30 and April 1.

Although Bangladesh won the three-match ODI series against the West Indies at home, totally different conditions will be awaiting the visitors, who have often been tested in the past by seaming and windy conditions that favour the home pacers. However, Bangladesh are expected to conduct a five-day training camp in Queenstown before the start of the series.

After conducting three rounds of coronavirus testing before boarding the flight, the Tigers will undergo another test upon landing in New Zealand before starting a mandatory 14-day quarantine



“For me, the first priority is playing for the country. If I am included in the squad for the Sri Lanka Tests then I will play. And if I am not picked in the squad then BCB will inform me that. I'll then ask BCB [for permission to play in IPL] and if the BCB decides [to give me NOC] then I will play in the IPL. But, for me, the country comes first.”

MUSTAFAZUR RAHMAN

at the Lincoln University Performance Centre outside Christchurch. All members of the team will have to stay in their hotel rooms for the first seven days and will be allowed to use the gym and also train together in the sports complex for the next seven days.

Bangladesh are yet to get a win in 26 international games in New Zealand, but ODI skipper Tamim Iqbal was hopeful of making history this time around. “Obviously, conditions in New Zealand have always been difficult for us, but it's nothing impossible. What we never achieved in New Zealand in the past... we will try to change the record this time around. We are hopeful,” Tamim said before boarding the flight for New Zealand yesterday.

Bangladesh will surely miss star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, who took a leave from the tour to stay beside his family for the birth of his third child.

Ctg Abahani breeze past Rahmatganj

SPORTS REPORTER



Chattogram Abahani registered back-to-back victories in the Bangladesh Premier League with a 2-0 win over Rahmatganj MFS at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Nigerian forward Chinedu Mathew put the port city side ahead in the first half before substitute Mannaf Rabbi wrapped up the victory to deliver the team's fourth victory in 10 matches, helping them to fifth position with 15 points.

Rahmatganj, on the other hand, remained in ninth position in the 13-team table with eight points from nine matches.

The charges of Maruful Haque had made a good start in the league but they failed to keep the momentum after losing to former champions Sheikh Russel KC and defending champions Bashundhara Kings, which were followed by draws against Abahani, Uttar Baridhara Club and Bangladesh Police.

However, they have started to show some consistency since the previous match, which they won 1-0 against Brothers Union. The port city side carried that form into

yesterday's match where they were hardly troubled by the Old Dhaka outfit.

Chattogram Abahani took only seven minutes to break the deadlock when national winger Rakib Hossain put a forward-pass for Mathew, who advanced into the box to shrug off his marker Nahidul Islam before placing a left-footer at the near post.

With Egyptian defender Alaedin Nasr thwarting a spate of Chattogram Abahani attacks, Rahmatganj came close to levelling the margin in the 33rd minute but Christ Remi's header on a corner from Mahmudul Hasan Kiran narrowly missed the target.

In both halves, Chattogram Abahani earned corner kicks but they could not cash in on those opportunities while Uzbek defender Shukuar Ali took some free-kicks either side of the break, barely troubling Rahmatganj goalkeeper Rassel Mahmud Liton.

However, the former national goalkeeper was helpless when substitute Rabbi volleyed home from close range following a nice exchange of passes between Nixon Guylherme and Mathew outside the box.



An early miss lit a fire under Cristiano Ronaldo in a Serie A encounter against Crotona on Monday, with the Juventus striker netting twice in a 3-0 win. He headed home the opening goal with a trademark gravity-defying header before showing pure desire for the second. Ronaldo collected the ball almost 40 yards out of goal and struck a wicked shot that the goalkeeper palmed away. Incredibly, CR7 raced into the box as the loose ball was whipped back in, heading home his second of the night.

PHOTO: REUTERS

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE ROUND OF 16



PHOTO: TWITTER

Real Madrid defender Ferland Mendy issued a rallying cry on the eve of their Champions League round of 16 clash against Borussia Monchengladbach tonight, saying that the players were “with Zinedine Zidane to the death” in response to criticism that they have come in for due to their poor recent form.

‘Gladbach ready to face the best team’ of Real Madrid clash

REUTERS, Moenchengladbach



Borussia Moenchengladbach coach Marco Rose heaped praise on their Champions League last 16 opponents Manchester City ahead of Wednesday's first leg, saying his players would be facing arguably the world's best team.

City are on a spectacular 18-game winning run across all competitions and are clear favourites, especially with the game having been moved to Budapest due to Germany's COVID-19 travel restrictions.

City are also on course for the Premier League title, having carved out a 10-point lead at the top of the table with Pep Guardiola's team in superb form. “I don't need to motivate our players. When you play as Gladbach in the Champions League round of 16 against Manchester City then you can only win from such a game,” Rose told a news conference.

“It is a huge thing for the club to be in this competition and we have always said we want to prove ourselves. City have world class players on all positions and we have the chance to measure ourselves against arguably the best team currently in the world.

“That is exactly what we want, why we play football,” Rose added.

A recent run of bad results has seen Gladbach drop to eighth in the Bundesliga. “The boys should go out and enjoy it tomorrow evening, that should be part of it,” Rose said. “But they also have to be at their maximum to show what they can do.”

AFP, Bergamo



Luis Muriel has moved beyond his ‘super-sub’ role with a rich vein of form to boost Atalanta's hopes against Real Madrid in the first leg of their last 16 Champions League tie in Bergamo on Wednesday.

Colombian ace Muriel scored and set up countryman Duvan Zapata for another as Atalanta warmed up for the Spanish champions with a 4-2 win over Napoli to move up to fifth in Serie A at the weekend.

“Muriel is extraordinary, not only for the assist and the goal,” said coach Gian Piero Gasperini after the forward scored in a ninth consecutive Serie A appearance as a starter.

“This year he has shown extraordinary mental, physical and athletic form, he has made a terrific leap in quality also in terms of consistency.”

The 29-year-old is having the best campaign of his career with 17 goals so far including two in the Champions League group stages.

In his debut season, Muriel earned a reputation as a super-sub, scoring 18 Serie A goals despite only starting 10 matches.

This season he has scored 14 league goals, the same as AC Milan star Zlatan Ibrahimovic, and behind Cristiano Ronaldo (18) for Juventus and Inter's Romelu Lukaku (17). Interestingly, only one of Muriel's goals have been from the spot.

“The coach is giving me space and more playing time lately so I want to make the most of it,” said Muriel, who has scored 36 goals in 71 games for Atalanta.

INDIA-ENGLAND TEST SERIES

Pink-ball battle at world's biggest cricket stadium

AFP, Ahmedabad



India and England head into a crucial third Test starting today at the world's biggest cricket stadium with more than a series between two of the biggest rivals at stake, according to their pace spearheads Ishant Sharma and Jimmy Anderson.

With the four-match series tied at 1-1, both sides need a win in Ahmedabad to be able to keep alive their hopes of reaching the World Test Championship final against New Zealand.

India just need to win the series to get through, while England have to win by 3-1. A tied series would let Australia through. The tension is rising in both camps who each registered a crushing win in the first two matches. “We have got to win two Tests matches, it is as simple as it gets for us,” said Anderson who took crucial wickets in England's 227 run win in the first game. “I have just one thing on my mind,” responded Sharma, India's 32-year-old veteran who will be in his 100th Test. “That is to win the next Test, win the series and qualify for the World Test Championship,” Sharma said.

India captain Virat Kohli wants his side to approach the pink-ball Test against England like a normal five-day match but with the sessions reversed. Kohli's century helped India crush Bangladesh by an innings and 46 runs in their maiden pink-ball Test in late 2019. “Last time we experienced that the first session is probably the nicest to bat, when the sun is out and the ball doesn't do much,” Kohli told a video conference on Tuesday.

HIGHLIGHT

The newly revamped Motera Stadium in Ahmedabad is all set to host the 3rd Test of the 4-match series which will be a pink ball fixture, to be played under lights. Motera Cricket Stadium is the largest cricket stadium in the world with a capacity of 1,10,000. As many as 55,000 fans are expected to be present at the stadium for the Day-Night Test, starting today.

“But when it starts to get dark, especially during that twilight, it gets very tricky. The light changes and it's difficult to sight the ball. “And then under the lights, it's like playing the first session in the morning in a normal test match. The ball does tend to swing a lot.

“So I think it's a reversal of roles and something that you need to adjust to quite quickly as a batsman.”

England captain Joe Root reckons batting collapses have become a “trend” in pink-ball Tests and cannot overstate the importance of the “vital first 20 deliveries” to his team mates ahead of the third Test.

“It seems to be a trend, and it's something that as a batting group you need to make sure that you stop,” Root told a video conference on Tuesday.

“One thing that stands out to me is the vital first 20 balls -- making sure you get used to tracking the ball, get used to the conditions and being very aware of how things can change throughout the day.”



India skipper Virat Kohli practises at the nets with the pink ball ahead of the third Test against England which starts in Ahmedabad today.

PHOTO: BCCI

Buffon not surprised by Inter's surge

AGENCIES, Turin

Gianluigi Buffon said after Juventus' 3-0 win at Crotona on Monday night that they would continue to chase Inter, but revealed that he was unsurprised by the form of Antonio Conte's men, who top Serie A after 23 games with 53 points.

Buffon kept a clean sheet in his 654th appearance for the Old Lady and left work satisfied on.

“The most important thing is that I get there by jumping,” Buffon told Sky Sport Italia. “It's the greatest satisfaction. It's the way you get there that makes the difference. I measure the width of my jumps every week, as long as it's good, I continue.”

Juventus are back on track after a winless run of three games and the veteran admitted the Bianconeri ‘needed the win’ that took Juventus to third with 45 points and a game in hand on both Inter and AC Milan, who have 49 points, above them.

Buffon said that the quality that Inter have now was something that he expected under Conte, who coached Buffon at Juventus for several title-winning years.

“It's certainly not a surprise. I would have been surprised if they did not show the quality of their coach and their squad. They have a value equal to ours, at least.”

Juventus coach Andrea Pirlo's belief was also steadfast. “All those behind Inter are antagonists, we are one of them and we will fight until the end,” he said.

Pirlo also felt that his side were helped by the goals before the break.

“We started a bit nervous, maybe the last defeats had made us nervous,” Pirlo told Sky Sport Italia. “Then the goals helped us and gave us peace of mind.”