



Bangladesh cricketers are already battling it out in their first ODI against New Zealand at the University Oval in Dunedin today. The Tigers, who are in search of their first international victory against the Kiwis in their backyard, had their last practice session in Dunedin yesterday ahead of the three-match ODI series, which will be followed by three T20Is.

PHOTO: BCB

NZ T20Is a dress rehearsal for the future

MAZHAR UDDIN

Bangladesh cricket is nearing a transition period as the fantastic five of Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Tamim Iqbal, Shakib Al Hasan, Mushfiqur Rahim and Mahmudullah Riyad are all in their mid to late 30s.

Now is the time to prepare for the vacuum that will be created when these stalwarts, inevitably, leave the scene.

The selectors have already moved on from Mashrafe, who retired from T20Is in 2017 and quit the ODI captaincy in March last year, giving opportunities to young seamers like Hasan Mahmud and Shoriful Islam and handing over the captaincy to Tamim.

Apart from Mashrafe the four others are still expected to go on playing till the 2023 World Cup as

well as in the longest format, fitness and performance permitting.

However, with Tamim set to miss the three-match T20I series against the Kiwis due to personal reasons and Shakib having skipped the tour for the birth of his third child, the time has come for the selectors to inject fresh faces in the T20 format.

Despite being the most successful batsman for Bangladesh across all formats, perhaps Tamim is also assessing his game when it comes to the shortest format. It would not be surprising if he makes way to allow youngsters to settle in.

Shakib on the other hand is arguably the most effective T20 cricketer that Bangladesh have ever produced but the star all-rounder is picking and choosing which games he plays. Shakib had earlier asked for a break from the upcoming two-match Test series against Sri Lanka scheduled for April to take part in the Indian Premier League, and the

BCB had granted his request.

Now, the main challenge for the Bangladesh think tank is to act keeping the long-term view in mind and start preparing the next lot of cricketers who could take responsibility for the Tigers' future and transform themselves into the new seniors.

Even Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) President Nazmul Hassan had stated recently that cricketers who are not interested to play a specific format need to inform the board so that selectors can form the squad with a long-term view.

Much like Shakib and Tamim, Mushfiqur or Mahmudullah also falls in the same category and might start prioritising their game and choose to play a specific format in the coming days keeping their fitness in mind. Like any other cricketing nation Bangladesh cricket will also face the vacuum when these seniors eventually

make way in future.

T20 cricket requires energy and excitement and the likes of Naim Sheikh, Nazmul Hossain Shanto, Soumya Sarkar and Liton Das have got the potential, which has been reflected in the past. But these players also need faith, freedom and time from the board, selectors, team management and also from spectators so the new lot of cricketers can grow in confidence, which has been the one thing found missing over the years.

Bangladesh will be without their two poster boys Shakib and Tamim in the upcoming three match T20I series against New Zealand, which follows the ODI series. While Shakib and Tamim's absence always poses a challenge for the Tigers, one good omen could be that the Tigers won their last T20I without the duo convincingly by nine wickets against Zimbabwe back in March 2020.

Rimon relishing left-back battle

SPORTS REPORTER



With regular left-back Rahmat Mia sidelined by Covid-19, newcomer Rimon Hossain of Bashundhara Kings is likely to step up as a replacement in the national team, who had their first training session in Kathmandu yesterday ahead of a tri-nation tournament starting on March 23.

Rimon, who hails from Naogaon, is eager to show his worth by facing the challenge head on irrespective of who is ahead of him in the pecking order and has succeeded in carving out a place in defending champions Bashundhara Kings' starting eleven.

"To be honest, I don't want to think much about who is playing at left-back in the national team. I really like taking on the challenge of securing a spot in starting elevens, like I did with Bashundhara Kings," Rimon told The Daily Star on the eve of his departure for Nepal on Thursday.

"I am ready for the challenge of securing a place in the national team but it is not that I must play for the national team on my first call. I want to utilise the opportunity in the best way whether I am given five minutes or 90 minutes," the lanky left-back, who was rewarded for consistent performances in the domestic circuit, added.

Rimon's biggest strength is one-on-one defending, with an ability to not let players get past him or whip in crosses. Further up, he is always on the overlap, ready to cross.

The younger left-back received high praise from Bashundhara Kings coach Oscar Bruzon for getting the better of Abahani's finest forward, Kervens Belfort, in the first meeting of the ongoing season.

Rimon gave all the credit to his academy - Shamsul Huda Football Academy in Jashore, which is producing a lot of top-

flight footballers.

"To be honest, I could never have reached this level if I did not get a chance in 2015 to train in the Shamsul Huda FA, which gave me everything for five years to mature as a footballer. Without the academy, I would perhaps have been playing second or third division football," he said, also thanking his parents for supporting him since childhood.

Rimon helped Bashundhara Kings become third in the Pioneer Football League in 2016 before playing for Arambagh Football Academy in the 2018 3rd Division League. He then played for Social Friends in



the 2019 2nd Division League before finally returning to Kings in the Bangladesh Premier League in 2020 and cementing a place.

"I never thought I would get a national call-up. After nine league matches, Jamie Day sent me a text saying that I had been playing well and if I kept it intact, I could train with the U-23 national team and the national football team. After receiving an SMS from Jamie, I realised that I was going to get a call-up for the national team.

"I haven't come here to disappear. My target is to stay in the national team for a long time by performing for both my club and the national team."



Bangladesh players engage in a group training session - their first since arriving in Nepal on Thursday - at the ANFA Ground yesterday ahead of a tri-nation tournament also featuring the hosts and a Kyrgyzstan U-23 side.

PHOTO: BFF



Paul Pogba came off the bench at half-time and scored the decisive goal within two minutes as Manchester United beat AC Milan 1-0 at San Siro on Thursday night for a 2-1 aggregate win in their Europa League Round of 16 fixture.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Bayern draw PSG; Real face Liverpool

AFP, PARIS

Holders Bayern Munich will face last year's beaten finalists PSG in the quarterfinals of this season's Champions League, while Friday's draw for the last eight also threw up a clash between Liverpool and Real Madrid.

The draw also pitted Premier League leaders Manchester City against Borussia Dortmund, with Chelsea set to play Porto in the other tie. The first leg is set to be played in Germany on April 6 or 7, with the return in Paris a week later.

City will be strong favourites against Dortmund, with the winner of that tie going through to a semi-final showdown with either Bayern or PSG.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE DRAW

QUARTERFINALS

Manchester City v Borussia Dortmund
Porto v Chelsea

Bayern Munich v Paris Saint-Germain
Real Madrid v Liverpool

First legs April 6/7, second legs April 13/14

SEMIFINALS

Bayern Munich or PSG v Manchester City or Borussia Dortmund
Real Madrid or Liverpool v Porto or Chelsea

First legs April 27/28, second legs May 4/5
FINAL IN ISTANBUL ON MAY 29

Baki, Munna fail in Delhi

SPORTS REPORTER

Though there was a slim chance of grabbing Tokyo Olympics quota places due to the absence of some European nations and the presence of already-qualified shooters in the ISSF World Cup in New Delhi, the Bangladeshi shooters failed to take that opportunity as they failed to reach the final round in 10m air rifle event yesterday.

Two-time Commonwealth Games silver medalist Abdullah Hel Baki finished 19th among 39 shooters in the qualifying round after scoring 624.5 points, 3.1 points less than Korea's Byounggil Choo, who qualified as the eighth shooter to qualify for the eight-man final round.

Rabbi Hasan Munna finished 18th with a score of 624.6 points while Indian shooter Arjun Babuta (631.8) and Divyansh Singh (629.1) moved into the final round finishing third and sixth in the qualification round.

In women's 10m air rifle event, Syeda Atkia Hasan Disha (618.3), Rithika Chowdhury (617.4) and Sharmin Akter Ratna (608.8) finished 39th, 42nd and 46th respectively among 48 shooters.

However, Disha, Rithika and Ratna moved to the final round of women's 10 air rifle team event with a score of 1844.5 points.

Stokes welcomes pressure of India T20I 'final'

AFP, Ahmedabad



Ben Stokes says England welcome the pressure of Saturday's "final" against India as they seek to become battle-hardened for this year's Twenty20 World Cup.

India levelled the five-match T20 series 2-2 when their bowlers stifled England's run chase for 186 despite Stokes's defiant 46 in Ahmedabad on Thursday.

"In an ideal world we would have loved to have gone into the next game having won the series and it sounds weird saying it, but we got a positive out of losing," said Stokes, after England fell eight runs short.

"We go into the next game with a huge

amount of pressure on our shoulders as a team because whoever wins that game wins the series. It's a final."

Saturday's match will again be in an empty stadium in Ahmedabad because of rising coronavirus numbers in India. But despite the lack of atmosphere, Stokes said it was still a good test for England.

"That's great for us as a team, especially with a T20 World Cup coming up," said Stokes.

"The more pressure situations we are put into as team, the better we'll be for it. We want to win and we want to make a habit of winning."

India will host the showpiece event for cricket's shortest format in October-November.



A total of 115 mountain bikers, including 10 females, participated in the Supercrete MTB Challenge 2021 in Sylhet on Friday. The bikers had to pedal through the marked trail at the hilly terrain of the Malnicherra Tea Estate in Sylhet. The distance for male cyclists was 25 kilometres and 17 kilometres for female cyclists.

PHOTO: DWOHA CHOWDHURY

Bangladesh Test dates for SL released

SPORTS REPORTER

Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) yesterday announced the schedule for the upcoming two-match Test series against Bangladesh. The visitors will play both the Tests, part of the ICC Test Championship, at the same venue in Pallekele Cricket Stadium, Kandy.

The first Test between the two South Asian nations will start on April 21 while the second Test will start on April 29.

The Tigers are scheduled to travel to Sri Lanka on April 12 and they will play an inter-squad two-day warm-up game on April 17 and 18 at the Chilaw Marians Cricket Club Ground in Katunayake.

The SLC backtracked on their decision of imposing strict quarantine protocol which had forced the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) to cancel a planned tour to the island nation in September last year.

Quarantine protocols were later relaxed for a touring England side in January this year. They were asked to isolate for three days after landing in Sri Lanka before being allowed to practise.

The Bangladesh team is currently on a tour to New Zealand for three ODIs and as many T20Is. The Tigers will play their last game of the tour on April 1.