

Onus on spinners in SL

SPORTS REPORTER

Spin has long been the Bangladesh team's main weapon over the years, especially in the game's longest format. And the Tigers' spinners will have a big job on their hands once again on their upcoming two-match Test series in Sri Lanka, where the hosts are set to test the visitors in their spin-friendly conditions with the first Test slated to start on April 21 in Kandy.

However, Bangladesh's record against Sri Lanka has been disappointing despite the Tigers playing the most number of Test matches against their Lankan counterparts. Apart from the only win, in Bangladesh's 100th Test in 2017, Bangladesh have lost 16 and drawn three of the other twenty encounters so far against Sri Lanka.

In the absence of their most experienced spinner in the form of Shakib Al Hasan, Bangladesh will heavily rely on left-arm spinner Taijul Islam and off-spinners Mehedi Hasan Miraz, Nayeem Hasan and Shuvagata Hom in the two-match Test series.

The Pallekele International Cricket Stadium in Kandy has historically favoured spinners and that was reflected even in the last two Tests at the ground where visiting spinners played huge roles in victories.

English spinners Jack Leach, Moeen Ali and Adil Rashid were instrumental as England sealed a 57-run win over the hosts in 2018 in what was the last Test that was played in Pallekele.

Although Bangladesh are yet



Bangladesh spinner Mehedi Hasan Miraz bowls during a practice session while left-arm spinner Taijul Islam looks on before the start of intra-squad warm-up match yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

BANGLADESH BOWLERS AGAINST SRI LANKA IN TESTS

PACE VS SPIN:

Spinners: 125, Pacers: 85)

BANGLADESH'S TOP THREE SPINNERS IN TESTS AGAINST SRI LANKA IN SRI LANKA:

Name	Pld	Wkts	Avg	Best
Mehedi Hasan Miraz	2	10	35.10	4/113
Shakib Al Hasan	3	9	46.11	4/74
Taijul Islam	1	2	39.00	2/78

TOP WICKET-TAKERS FOR BANGLADESH IN LAST ONE YEAR IN TESTS:

Name	Inns	Wkts	Avg
Taijul Islam	4	12	26.58
Mehedi Hasan Miraz	4	10	26.10
Abu Jayed	2	6	21.66

to play a Test match in Pallekele, the likes of Taijul and Miraz will definitely look to cash in on their experience in the upcoming Tests, both of which will be at the same venue.

Selectors are yet to announce the final squad for the series but the Tigers, who lack experience in the pace bowling department, will surely be looking for spinners to take the leading role.

Among a current lot of cricketers, Miraz has been the most successful bowler for the Tigers in Sri Lanka, picking up ten wickets in two Tests. The off-spinner is also the second-highest wicket-taker for Bangladesh in the longest format of the game in the past year, with ten wickets for the Tigers, behind Taijul Islam's 12 wickets.

Taijul will play a key role as the only specialist left-arm spinner in the side and the 29-year-old has developed into a world-class spinner over the past few years.

However, one of the major concerns for the Bangladeshi spinners has been an inability to perform away from home and a lack of experience has been highlighted as one of the biggest reasons.

Nayeem Hasan, who has picked up 25 wickets in seven Tests so far, has played just one Test away from home and has not scalped a wicket abroad.

It will be important for Bangladeshi spinners to hit the right areas often to get the most purchase out of the pitch and it is the spinners who will play a huge role if the Tigers want to pick twenty wickets in a Test match in the island nation this time around.

Batsmen star on first day of practice game

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh's batsmen had a fruitful outing in the first day of the two-day intra-squad practice game as a total of four fifties were struck at the Chilaw Marians Cricket Club ground in Katunayake yesterday.

Team Red, led by Tamim Iqbal, posted 314 for 6 at stumps and saw five of their batters retire to allow others to bat.

At tea, Team Red were on 204 without loss. Tamim retired after scoring 63 and Saif Hasan added 52 runs before retiring.

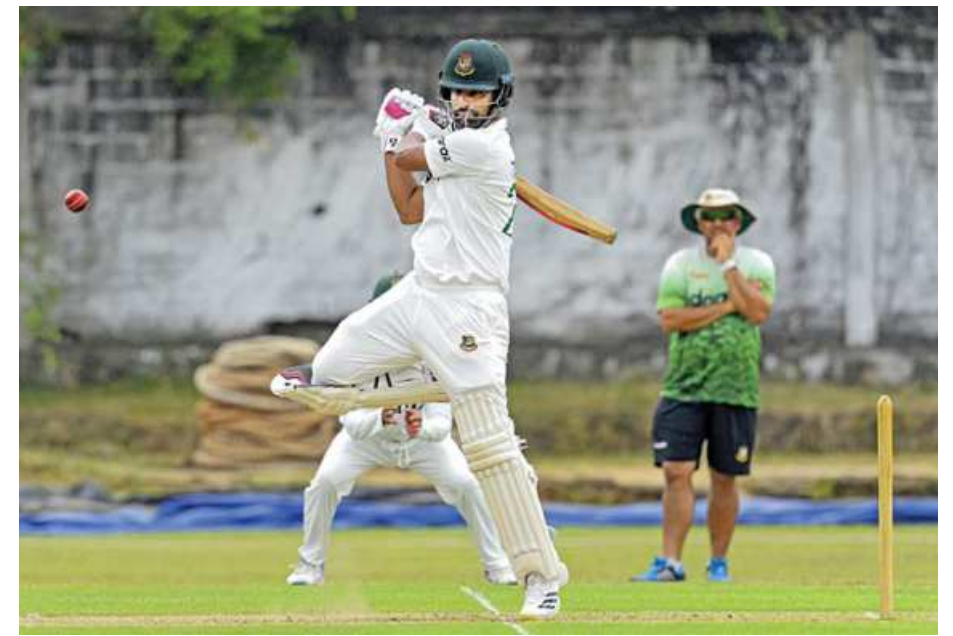
Mushfiqur Rahim then spent time in the middle and top-scored with 66 while Najmul Hossain Shanto added 52 and Nurul Hasan scored 48. Team Green off-spinner Shuvagata Hom picked up the only wicket, dismissing Taijul Islam.

Chief selector Minhajul Abedin believed that the practice game would help players adapt to the pitch and conditions in Sri Lanka before the Test series.

"The bowlers had had a tough time here today [Saturday]. The wicket and conditions, there is good bounce as the track is a bit flat. Conditions might be similar in Test matches. It will be really important for our bowlers to concentrate in such scorching temperatures and bowl in the right areas," Minhajul said.

Following a three-day quarantine in their rooms after landing in Sri Lanka, the 21-member Bangladesh squad got two days of practice in the nets before playing the ongoing practice match.

Selectors are expected to announce the final squad after the practice game before the first of the two match test series scheduled to start on April 21 in Pallekele.



Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal plays a shot during the intra-squad warm-up match at the Marians Cricket Club Ground in Katunayake yesterday ahead of their first Test against Sri Lanka, starting from April 21.

PHOTO: AFP

I'm always sad to lose here, says Nadal

REUTERS



Rafa Nadal said he missed the opportunity to get his claycourt season off to a title-winning start after a 6-2 4-6 6-2 defeat by Russian Andrey Rublev in the quarter-finals of the Monte Carlo Masters on Friday.

Playing his first tournament since losing to Stefanos Tsitsipas in the Australian Open quarter-finals, 20-times Grand Slam champion Nadal struggled to serve as he crashed to only his sixth defeat at the tournament he has won 11 times.

"It's been such an important tournament during my career. I'm always sad to lose here because it's an important one for me. I missed an opportunity to start the clay season in the right way," Nadal told reporters.

"But that's it... It's not the moment to complain. When you're not able to do the things you had to do on court, then it's not the moment to complain after."

"The only thing that I can do is go to Barcelona and keep practising, try to fix the things that didn't work well... Lots of mistakes... A few things that make a big difference on the result and on my game that I wasn't able to make today."

Rublev said his first victory over Nadal was among the best of his career but acknowledged the Spaniard was off his game.

Nadal served seven double faults and was broken seven times.

"If we look (at) a player like Rafa, the best claycourt player in history, then it's one of my best victories," Rublev, who faces Casper Ruud next, said.

"But if you look at it from the other side... for sure he didn't play his 'good' level. In his position it's tough when people expect that... you have to win every time."

"... It's so tough to play with this feeling."



PHOTO: REUTERS

'Pakistan's T20 WC preparations are on the right track'

AGENCIES



Pakistan's Fakhar Zaman struck a blazing half-century as they survived a scare to seal a three-wicket victory over depleted South Africa with a ball to spare and win the four-match Twenty20 International series 3-1 on Friday.

Pakistan captain Babar Azam, who also captained his side to a 2-1 ODI series victory against South Africa, has said preparations for this year's World Cup in India are on the right track.

Meanwhile, Babar Azam-led team will have no difficulty in travelling to India for the global event in October as the Indian government is set to grant visas to the players from the neighbouring nation, reports PTI.

It has been learnt that BCCI secretary Jay Shah has informed the Apex Council about the government's decision on giving visas to the Pakistan players.

"The visa issue of Pakistan cricket team has been sorted. However, whether the fans can travel across the border to watch matches is still not clear," an Apex Council member told PTI on conditions of anonymity.

India and Pakistan have not



Pakistan players celebrate their series victory against South Africa following three-wicket win in the fourth Twenty20 international on Friday.

PHOTO: TWITTER

played bilateral series for many years now due to political tension between two countries.

Babar said after the T20I series win against South Africa that "It's great to win both the white-ball series in South Africa and this will give us lot of confidence for the coming matches."

"The series has helped us try out different combinations and

I think we are on track in our preparations for the World T20 Cup, by which time we will have our squad ready for the big event," Babar said.

"I think as a team we did well, we supported each other and the bowlers also staged some strong comebacks in the series although we couldn't take early wickets," he added.

"The more you are successful against good opposition and in different conditions it helps you develop and become a better batsman."

Pakistan will depart for Zimbabwe on Saturday where they will play three T20Is on 21, 23 and 25 April, followed by two Tests, which will be played from 29 April to 3 May and 7-11 May.

'Real are in very good shape mentally'

AGENCIES



Real Madrid will be aiming to make it five La Liga victories in a row when they travel to Coliseum Alfonso Perez tonight to take on Getafe.

Zinedine Zidane's side are currently second in the table, one point behind leaders Atletico Madrid, while Getafe occupy 15th position, just four points outside of the relegation zone.

Meanwhile, top will take on bottom tonight as Atletico Madrid welcome Eibar to Wanda Metropolitano, with both teams desperate to secure all three points but for very different reasons.

Atletico will be looking to stay on top while Eibar occupy 20th position, four points from the safety of 17th spot with eight games left.

"I'm sure that the fans are proud of the team and as the coach, I'm



really happy because all of the players are very committed. We now face 10 games in the space of a month and it's just the way it is. It's the situation we face, but we're pleased to be in the hunt in both competitions. We're focused because we've got a really important game tomorrow. This group has won a lot but is always hungry for more," said Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane

following the team's final training session ahead of Getafe encounter. "It's been an intense time with demanding games, but the important thing is that we're in very good shape mentally. We face a really tough physical test tomorrow and there are three points at stake. The squad is committed and focused on what'll be a really tough game against Getafe."

Ronaldo to miss crucial Atalanta clash

REUTERS

Juventus forward Cristiano Ronaldo will miss his side's crucial trip to Atalanta tonight with a thigh injury, with his coach Andrea Pirlo insisting the setback comes from playing too many matches.

Juve are 12 points behind leaders Inter Milan with eight games left, and with a 10th successive Scudetto seemingly out of reach they will be aiming to hold on to a top-four spot in the race for the Champions League qualification places. The third-placed champions travel to Atalanta in fourth on Sunday just one point ahead of Gian Piero Gasperini's side and three clear of fifth-placed Napoli, with the clash now seemingly more difficult given they are missing Serie A's top goalscorer.

"There is a big absence and it is Cristiano," Pirlo told a news conference. "He has not been able to recover from a thigh problem. We decided to let him rest and try to recover for Wednesday's match (against Parma)."

"Speaking with his coach, with him and with the doctor, it was too risky to bring him to push. He has played too many matches, even those with the national team."

