

Kohli now quits Test captaincy

AFP, New Delhi

India's Virat Kohli announced Saturday he was stepping down as Test captain, a day after his side lost a three-match series to South Africa.

"Everything has to come to a halt at some stage and for me as Test captain of India, it's now," he posted on Twitter after seven years in the high-pressure position.

The 33-year-old Kohli, who quit as Twenty20 skipper after a debacle at the World Cup and then lost the one-day job, took over the India leadership across formats from MS Dhoni in 2017.

"There have been many ups and also some downs along the journey, but never has there been a lack of effort or lack of belief," Kohli said. "I have always believed in giving my 120 percent in everything I do, and if I can't do that, I know it's not the right thing to do."

'Work on RCA to begin shortly'

SPORTS REPORTER

from Sylhet

The formation of regional cricket associations (RCA) has been an unfulfilled promise in Nazmul Hassan's last two terms as Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president.

While talking to reporters at Sylhet Cricket Stadium yesterday, BCB director Shafiul Alam Chowdhury Nadel informed that work on the formation of RCAs will begin shortly following an extraordinary general meeting (EGM). "We tried the RCA with the last two terms of the board. Unfortunately, it has not been very effective. The amendments have been made to BCB's constitution which will be approved in the EGM. "We're hoping that in the next month or the month after that, we will hold an EGM and officially begin activities for enacting the RCA this year through the amendments made in the constitution," Nadel said.



Bangladesh Test captain Mominul Haque leads the team out of the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport on Saturday evening after arriving from New Zealand where they drew the two-match Test series 1-1 following a historic first-ever win in the country. The skipper, while speaking to reporters, stressed on the importance of continuous improvement, both at home and abroad.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Wickets confound in BCL

SPORTS REPORTER from Sylhet

Central Zone completed a double at South Zone's expense as yesterday's Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL) final played out in similar manner to a majority of matches since the one-day version of the tournament began on January 9.

Central Zone had clinched the title in the four-day version of the BCL in Mirpur on January 6 against the same opposition and secured a second trophy with a six-wicket win at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday.

Wickets in Sylhet are known for producing run-fests but -- barring the one game where Central Zone put up 262 for five against North Zone at the Sylhet Academy ground -- the scores were average and batters failed to make hay.

On a slightly hazy morning, Central Zone elected to field after winning the toss but South Zone openers Pinak Ghosh (35) and Anamul Haque (20) put together a 51-run stand. Then the spinners and medium pacers once again came to the fore as Nazmul Islam, Mosaddek Hossain, Hasan Murad and Soumya Sarkar dictated proceedings with two wickets each. Eventually, South Zone were bowled out for just 163.

Central openers got their team off to a solid start as Soumya and Mizanur Rahman strung together a 65-run stand before South Zone's spinners pulled things back. Soumya departed to Nasum after a 25-ball 21 before spinner Mahedi Hasan sent back Abdul Mazid for 1. Nasum then scalped



both Mohammad Mithun (4) and set opener Mizanur (39) to set up a tense finale.

However, Skipper Mosaddek's 33 and Mohammad Al Amin's 53 during an unbroken 88-run stand saw Central celebrate another title in the space of days.

While the tournament's competitiveness was applauded on many fronts, the lack of runs did not amuse batters. "How can one time shots if the ball does not arrive? It's hard to get any pace on it if it comes on slow," a batter claimed after one of the matches.

There was some movement for seamers due to the conditions but how the surfaces played, with batters failing to judge the pace and uneven bounce against spinners and medium pace, made run-scoring difficult.

"Yesterday, we thought this would be a

high-scoring affair with around 250 runs on the board. Sometime there can be low scores because it's a final but the wicket could have been better," opined Central Zone skipper Mosaddek, who stated after their last league match that it was difficult to hone one's skill for shorter formats on these wickets.

However, it was difficult to find any information on the technicalities of making wickets in Sylhet.

Upon several requests from this reporter to talk to the curator, no permission was given from the board. While the tournament had its ups and downs for cricketers involved, the mystifying nature of why wickets do not behave the way they should continue to bubble in Bangladesh cricket.

Young Tigers begin title defence

SPORTS REPORTER

With an aim of retaining the title, defending champions Bangladesh take on England in their opening game of the ICC Under-19 World Cup at the Warner Park, Basseterre in the West Indies today.

Bangladesh, placed in group A, will also face Canada and the United Arab Emirates in their next two group games scheduled to take place on January 20 and 22 respectively.

The expectations from this lot remain sky-high after the previous batch brought Bangladesh its first World Cup with the Akbar Ali-led side beating India in the final to re-write history.

Rakibul Hasan, who was a member of that World Cup-winning team, will be leading the young Tigers this time around. The likes of Tanzim Hasan Sakib and Prantik Nawrose Nabil, playing in this tournament, were also part of the previous squad. Preparation-wise, the current squad lag behind as the previous batch of the young Tigers had played more than 30 matches as the lead-up to the 2020 edition of the World Cup.

But, due to the Covid-19 outbreak, the game development committee was unable to arrange as many matches ahead of the upcoming Under-19 World Cup as Bangladesh played just 12 games, managing wins in just three of those, before they headed to the Caribbean.

Bangladesh were thrashed 5-0 by Sri Lanka in a series in October last year which forced the selectors to include experienced Rakibul and Tanzim in the side. After that, the young Tigers won a triangular series in India and also reached the semifinal of the ACC Asia Cup in December last year. Bangladesh also registered a comprehensive 155-run win against Zimbabwe in only the official warm-up game prior to the World Cup.

Middle-order batter Aich Mollah will be the player to watch in the Tigers' batting department. He scored a run-a-ball 82 against Zimbabwe in the warm-up game. The likes of Ariful Islam, Mahfijul Islam and Prantik are also expected to play key roles with the bat for the title defenders.

Bangladesh's strength, however, lies in their bowling department with the presence of experienced left-arm spinner Rakibul and seamer Tanzim. Another left-arm spinner, Naimur Rohoman will also boost the bowling attack. He picked 18 wickets in eleven games at an average of just below 20 while also bagging a five-wicket haul.

The World Cup-winning squad in the previous edition provided the Bangladesh national side with a few talents and it is expected that the country will get a few more future stars from this lot of young cricketers.



Australia got things underway with a six-wicket win over West Indies in the ICC U-19 World Cup in Providence on Friday.

PHOTO: ICC

All to play for as Djokovic returns to detention

REUTERS, Melbourne

Clinging to his dream of winning a record 21st major title at the Australian Open, tennis world number one Novak Djokovic returned to an all too familiar immigration detention hotel on Saturday, waiting for a court to decide if he should be deported.

Djokovic arrived at Melbourne's Park Hotel around 3:30 pm, according to a Reuters witness. It is the same immigration detention hotel where the unvaccinated Serbian superstar was held last week over visa problems related to a COVID-19 medical exemption.

About a dozen refugee activists chanted "stop the torture ... let them out" as Djokovic and Border Force guards drove into the underground garage of the hotel, which is also being used to hold 33 asylum seekers and travellers in COVID-19 quarantine.

A man cycling past the hotel shouted: "Go home, Novak!"

A Border Force spokesperson confirmed that Djokovic has been detained.

The saga that has dominated headlines worldwide for the past week could climax on Sunday, when a Federal Court convenes to hear the 34-year-old's appeal against the Australian government's second attempt to boot him out.

The tournament, which Djokovic has won nine times previously, starts on Monday.

Djokovic's leading rivals have become increasingly impatient with the uncertainty

hanging over the draw and the cloud hanging over their sport.

"Honestly I'm little bit tired of the situation because I just believe that it's important to talk about our sport, about tennis," Spaniard Rafa Nadal, who is tied on 20 major titles with Djokovic, told reporters at Melbourne Park, where the event will be played.

German Alexander Zverev, the world number three, said Djokovic had been treated unfairly and that the Serb might have been used as a political pawn by Australian authorities, something Canberra has denied. "This is obviously not a nice thing for everyone, for him especially. But don't question his legacy because of this," Zverev said.

A Croatian tennis coach, who was among a handful of visitors granted a medical exemption for the Australian Open, told The Australian newspaper he had to leave the country because Djokovic had become a political target.

Djokovic, who is scheduled to play fellow Serb Miomir Kecmanovi in the first round of the Open, is hunting a record-breaking 21st Grand Slam title. He could still withdraw and leave Australia of his own accord rather than suffer the humiliation of being deported.

"Australian Open is much more important than any player," said Nadal, whom Djokovic considers his greatest rival. "If he's playing finally, OK. If he's not playing, Australian Open will be great ... with or without him."



Manchester City midfielder Kevin De Bruyne (C) sets off to celebrate his decisive goal against title-rivals Chelsea in a top-of-the-table clash of the Premier League at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester on Saturday. The victory took Pep Guardiola's charges to 56 points, 13 clear of their London rivals.

PHOTO: AFP