

Looking at his willow, Bangladesh batter Mahmudullah Riyad was probably contemplating reasons behind his poor run of form during the Tigers' practice session in Mirpur yesterday. Bangladesh will leave for South Africa for their upcoming series on March 11.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Although the BCB has granted Shakib a leave from all formats till April 30, Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, a very trusted man among the country's leading cricketers including Shakib, stressed importance on managing the senior players well and thought that it's not only about the South Africa tour but the board desperately need to arrive at a long-term plan about the availability of senior players. "We must understand that players like Shakib are at the tail end of their career and facing some limitations. But the country's cricket can get a valuable service from them for the next two-three years if the board chalks out a proper plan to bring confidence in them. I think there is a huge gap between the board and the player in terms of trust and mutual respect. It will set a bad example for our cricket if a player like Shakib signs off his career in chaos," Fahim said.

Mt Maunganui triumph on TAMIM'S MIND

Now I will say that we want to win there, and we will do what we have to do to win. If we get the result, very good. If we don't, we will work harder.

SPORTS REPORTER

Despite there being no official practice session for the national team at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium yesterday, the media present was anxious to get their hands on the latest update regarding one particular issue, the focal point of which was all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan's availability for the upcoming tour of South Africa.

The all-rounder had missed the Test tour to New Zealand this year with the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) granting him leave after having included him in the squad for the Tests. This time the BCB had been more vocal after Shakib's announcement on Sunday that he was not mentally or physically fit to play international cricket. The BCB president had reiterated that seniors needed to decide which formats they wanted to play in without impeding team management's processes regarding building the team for the future. Despite the noise, later in the evening yesterday, the BCB granted Shakib a leave till April 30th from all cricket after the all-rounder sought to skip the

upcoming tour of South Africa tour.

The issue of Shakib taking break from important series has been a touchy one for the BCB. ODI captain Tamim Iqbal, who partook in an individual session yesterday, was also not in a mood to become part of the noise around Shakib's availability. Tamim asked the media to refrain from asking anything on the matter but was content to give his views on the upcoming ODI series against South Africa.

Even as he was not talking about the South Africa Tests, the Bangladesh Test side that won a historic first match at Kiwi soil was where Tamim was looking for inspiration ahead of a tough tour. Bangladesh had lost all nine ODIs they have played so far in South Africa and all six Tests till date as well. The record is similar to what was the case in New Zealand before that victory at Mount Maunganui.

"We don't have a great record in South Africa but records can change and a great example is our Test win in New Zealand," Tamim told reporters on Wednesday. "We turned things around there after many years. We couldn't win in 30-32 matches in New Zealand but the Test team changed that. I'm hopeful this team will force the same change [in South Africa]. Belief makes a big difference. We will try to do the same in South Africa.

"We know it will be difficult since they

are a very, very good team in their own conditions. Ten years ago, I would have said that we want to play good cricket. Now I will say that we want to win there, and we will do what we have to do to win. If we get the result, very good. If we don't, we will work harder.

Tamim was looking for players from that Mount Maunganui victory to lead the way in terms of how to go about things in tough away conditions. "I wasn't with the team in New Zealand, unfortunately. I want those who were in that squad, to speak about it. Many of them are in the ODI squad, so they can talk about their thought process, and what they were thinking at the time to turn things around," added Tamim.

The ODI series win against Afghanistan did not find batters to be consistent and in a great vein of form but the fielding problems remained persistent. Tamim said, "We didn't bat well as a unit. I didn't score runs. Shakib didn't find runs as well. But that's fine. Not worried about batting but fielding is one thing we have to improve."

Tamim himself has been keen to work on his footwork with batting coach Jamie Siddons during the Afghan ODIs.

"He is very honest. If I'm doing something [wrong], he will tell me," he reiterated. The Tigers will depart for South Africa with the ODI side leaving on March 11 on two separate flights while members of the Test side will leave on March 12.

Booters set for camp on March 19

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh head coach Javier Cabrera will get only four days to prepare the national football team for their FIFA friendly match against hosts Maldives on March 25 at the National Stadium in Male.

All the 30 members of the preliminary squad, expected to be announced by March 13-14, will join the residential camp on March 19 at the Bashundhara Kings Arena after reporting to the newly-appointed manager Iqbal Hossain the day before.

"The national team will train three days from March 19 to 21 at the Bashundhara Kings Arena before leaving Dhaka for Male on March 22. The match is scheduled for March 24," said national team committee chairman and Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) vice president Kazi Nabil Ahmed in a video message after a meeting yesterday.

"The team will come back on March 25 and travel to Sylhet on March 26 for their match against Mongolia on March 29," Ahmed added. "We are hoping for a good preparation as well as good results for the national team."

Local coaches Hasan Al Mamun and Masud Parvez Kaiser will be acting as assistant coaches to Cabrera.

Some 23 footballers are supposed to travel to play against the Maldives, who beat Bangladesh 2-0 during the SAFF Championship but lost 2-1 to the booters in a four-nation tournament in Sri Lanka last year.

Mabia, Ashiqur allowed direct entry to CG

SPORTS REPORTER

South Asian Games gold medalist weightlifter Mabia Akter Simanta and Ashiqur Rahman Taj have been allowed direct entry to the upcoming Commonwealth Games, thanks to their good performance in the regional competitions.

Birmingham Commonwealth Games authority confirmed it to the Bangladesh Olympic Association and Bangladesh Weightlifting Federation yesterday.

Mabia will compete in 64kg weight category while Taj will feature in 55kg weight category of the Games, scheduled to begin on July 28 in Birmingham.

Apart from weightlifting, Bangladesh will also participate in swimming, athletics, boxing, gymnastics, wrestling and table tennis.

China exit bodes well for Bangladesh

SPORTS REPORTER

Holders Bangladesh are expected to be under less pressure in their AHF Cup title defence as top-favourite China withdrew from the tournament, set to begin tomorrow in Indonesia.

"If we can reach the semifinals, then we will have easier matches in the semifinals as China pulled out," said Bangladesh Hockey Federation's acting general secretary Mohammad Yousuf, who is accompanying the boys in red and green to Jakarta.

Bangladesh will start the campaign by taking on hosts Indonesia on the opening day.

'This was a statement from Bayern'

AGENCIES

Bayern Munich's Robert Lewandowski grabbed the earliest hat-trick in Champions League history with three goals by the 23rd minute as the Germans steamrollered Salzburg 7-1 on Tuesday to book a place in the quarter-finals with an 8-2 aggregate score.

"This was definitely a statement from us, and it gives us hope that there is more like this to come," Bayern captain Manuel Neuer told Amazon Prime after his side reached the last eight for a record 20th time.

Bayern, who have been unpredictable in the Bundesliga this year, have now scored seven or more goals in a Champions League game for a record seventh time.

"We started well and presented ourselves differently from recent weeks. That gives you hope that this will go on. You could see from the start that we had a good attitude," said Neuer.

The keeper also set a record with his 104th appearance in the competition, overtaking current club CEO Oliver Kahn as the Bayern keeper with the most games in the Champions League.

"The game was of huge importance for us," Mueller said. "Had we been eliminated today we would have faced three sad months and people would be rightly questioning things."

"Today it was an opponent on a different level," Salzburg defender Rasmus Kristensen said.

"We had some chances but if you don't make them count it's difficult. It had nothing to do with attitude, focus or the match plan. They simply were better in all aspects - that's it."

Salzburg had two golden chances early in the game and came agonisingly close to an equaliser in the 15th minute when Neuer, back from a knee injury, pulled off the save of the game to tip Nicolas Seiwald's missile over the bar.

But even though Salzburg had not conceded more than two goals in a competitive match this season, they could do nothing to stop in-form Lewandowski.

Bayern Munich striker Robert Lewandowski scored a record-breaking 11-minute hat-trick during a 7-1 win at home to Red Bull Salzburg on Tuesday. The Polish striker had three goals to his name by the 23rd minute -- the earliest anyone has ever completed a hat-trick in a Champions League game. With just ten minutes and 27 seconds between Lewandowski's first and third goals, it was the fastest of the six hat-tricks the Pole has now scored in the Champions League.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Liverpool into quarters despite loss

REUTERS, Liverpool

Liverpool stuttered into the quarter-finals of the Champions League with a 2-1 aggregate win over Inter Milan after suffering a 1-0 loss to the Italian side, who were reduced to 10 men, at Anfield on Tuesday.

After a cagey first half, a superb drive into the top corner from Lautaro Martinez in the 62nd minute put Inter ahead on the night.

Although the defeat ended Liverpool's seven-match winning run in the Champions League they achieved their goal of reaching the last eight for the fourth time in the last five seasons.

"The art of football is to lose the right games. I still hate it, but if there's any game we could afford to lose it was tonight," said Klopp.

"Over the two games I think we deserved it. It is fair that we are through against a tough opponent".