

India eye series sweep against SL

REUTERS, MUMBAI

Injury-hit Sri Lanka will need nothing less than a miracle to deny hosts India a 2-0 sweep in the Test series when the two sides meet in the second and final Test in Bengaluru, which will be played under the lights from Saturday.

Led by new Test captain Rohit Sharma, the side blanked Sri Lanka by an innings and 222 runs in the opening match in Mohali.

To make matters worse for the touring side, Pathum Nissanka, who scored an unbeaten 61 in the first innings at Mohali, has been ruled out with a back injury.

Fast bowler Dushmantha Chameera was also unavailable, while paceman Lahiru Kumara injured his hamstring on the opening day at Mohali.

The hosts, in contrast, have welcome back fit-again Axar Patel for the Bengaluru Test.



A banner shows the camaraderie between Atalanta's Ukrainian midfielder Ruslan Malinovskyi (L) and Russian midfielder Aleksey Miranchuk with the two countries' flags as the background of the banner during the team's Europa League fixture against Leverkusen in Bergamo on Thursday. The Italian club's coach and players have hailed the two players' friendship during a time when the two countries are at war. Malinovskyi, who opened the scoring during Atalanta's 3-2 win, celebrated his goal by pointing his fingers to the sky, dedicating the goal to the war victims.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Aus brace for Karachi challenge

REUTERS, KARACHI

Beginning a tour of the sub-continent with a draw is a result perfectly acceptable to most visiting captains but Australia skipper Pat Cummins knows the task gets significantly tougher for his team in the second Test against Pakistan on Saturday.

Australia's first Test in Pakistan in 24 years turned out to be a run-feast in Rawalpindi where 1,187 runs were scored and only 14 wickets fell. Things are likely to spice up on a dry track at Karachi's National Stadium where spin and reverse swing should ensure runs are not taken for granted.

Australia have responded by harnessing debutant Mitchell Swepson with Nathan Lyon in a two-man spin attack, sacrificing the pace of Josh Hazlewood and endorsing Mitchell Starc's reverse swing skills.

'South Africa taking Bangladesh seriously'

SPORTS REPORTER

With the aim to turn fortunes around in South Africa, where Bangladesh are yet to register a win across all formats, majority of the Tigers departed for their African safari yesterday.

Players of the one-day squad left the country in two separate groups yesterday while the third group, comprising the Test squad's exclusive members, were scheduled to depart in the morning flight today.

The Tamim Iqbal-led ODI squad is set to start training on Monday following a day's rest. The visitors won't get enough time to adjust with the conditions as the first of the three-match ODI series is scheduled on March 18 in Centurion.

Member of the national selection panel and former captain Habibur Bashar, who had accompanied the team before departure, mentioned that despite the insufficient time for adjustment to conditions, he remains hopeful over the preparation ahead of the series.

"Considering the time and situation, I think there was no scope for better preparation for us. Obviously, it would've been good if we could travel there early as the conditions in South Africa are different," Bashar told the media at the Hazrat Shahjalal Airport yesterday.

"If we could've stayed for a prolonged time and played a couple of practice

matches, it may have benefitted us. But there is nothing to do and whatever time we get, we will try to prepare accordingly."

With 100 points, the Tigers sit pretty at the top of the ICC ODI Super League table and skipper Tamim had expressed that he'd even seek inspiration from the historic Mount Maunganui Test win against New Zealand earlier this year, in order to prosper in the series ahead.



Bangladesh played six Tests, nine ODIs and four T20Is so far in South Africa and lost all games. However, Bashar believes that if the Tigers can continue their good form, there is a chance to rewrite the history this time around.

"The South African team is pretty good and the conditions are also challenging for us. But if you look at our ODI form, we can certainly be hopeful.

"We know that it will be difficult as they will play with their full-strength side. Also, they've organised the matches at their main venues which means South Africa are taking Bangladesh seriously," he said.

Asked if the team would miss Shakib Al Hasan in the tough Proteas tour, the 49-year-old reminded that Bangladesh in the past have played well despite the absence of the star all-rounder.

"Obviously, we are going to miss Shakib as he is a very important player for us and he brings a lot of balance in the team. But you won't get your best player all the time and whoever is playing in place of him is also our best player.

"We have to try with what we got and we've played well without our best player in the past," said Bashar.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Test squad led by Mominul Haque will take the direct flight to Cape Town and proceed to undergo a training camp at the Gary Kirsten Academy.

According to sources, Kirsten is also expected to oversee the training camp along with the Tigers' former fielding coach Ryan Cook. Former South African cricketer Justin Kemp will also assist the Test squad's training.

The first of the two-match Test series is scheduled to begin on March 30 in Durban while the second Test will be underway on April 7 in Port Elizabeth.

Bangladesh thrash Indonesia 7-2



SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh got off to a flying start in their defence of the AHF Cup title with a thumping 7-2 win over hosts Indonesia at the Gelora Bung Karno Hockey field in Jakarta yesterday.

Even though the charges of Iman Gobinathan Krishnamurthy looked a bit nervous initially against the hosts, who are 13 places behind 36th-ranked Bangladesh, they shrugged off their shakiness after taking the lead, with Khorshehur Rahman converting the third penalty corner in the 15th minute.

Arshad Hossain scored the second with a flick in the 20th minute before Sabuj smashed a reverse hit to make the margin 3-0 three minutes later. Khorshehur Rahman widened the margin by converting the sixth penalty corner in the 27th minute.

Pushkor Khisa Mimo scored the fifth goal for Bangladesh in the 49th minute before goals from Rasel Mahmud Jimmy and Roman Sarkar made it 7-0 for Bangladesh. The hosts, however, pulled two goals back in the last stage of the game to leave the field with some consolation. Bangladesh play against Singapore on Monday.



Spurs test for Man United

REUTERS

One week on from their mauling by arch-rivals Manchester City, Manchester United take on fellow top-four hopefuls Tottenham Hotspur on Saturday looking to salvage what is left of their season.

While they still have the Champions League to fight for, recent form has led to United staring at the prospect of another disappointing campaign. The 13-times Premier League champions are fifth in the standings, one point behind Arsenal in the final Champions League qualification spot, but Rangnick's men have played three more games than Mikel Arteta's side.

What is not clear is the version of Tottenham which turns up at Old Trafford on Sunday.

Antonio Conte's side remain in the race for the top four, sitting seventh, two points behind United with two games in hand, but inconsistency has hampered their progress - Spurs have not won back-to-back games since December in all competitions.

Kings gain ascendancy as rivals stumble

SPORTS REPORTER

Defending champions Bashundhara Kings widened their lead in the Bangladesh Premier League with a thumping 5-0 win over Chittagong Abahani at the Bashundhara Kings Arena while title contenders Abahani slipped again after playing out a 1-1 draw at the Muktiyoddha Smriti Stadium in Rajshahi yesterday.

In the day's other match in Munshiganj, title aspirants Sheikh Jamal DC and Saif Sporting Club cancelled each other with a 2-2 draw at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Flight Lt. Matiur Rahman Stadium.

The latest win, being the seventh successive triumphs in eight matches, took Kings to 21 points, four ahead of nearest rivals Abahani, who drew second time in eight matches while Sheikh Jamal, Ctg Abahani and Saif SC occupy the third, fourth and fifth position with 16, 12 and 11 points, respectively, in as many matches.

Kings and Ctg Abahani were expected to lock horns in a mouth-watering clash, based on their head-to-head records in six games, where the two sides remained even with two draws and two victories apiece. However, Kings ended up toying with the port-city side and continued their unstoppable form on their home ground, bagging five victories on the trot.

The two-time champions did not allow the absence of few key foreign players to be felt as the local guns combined with the Brazilian forward Robson Da Silva to expose

their opponents completely and achieve their second-highest margin of victory, behind the 6-0 against Uttar Baridhara Club last season.

A 17th minute header from national striker Suman Reza opened the floodgates before Robson doubled the margin in the 28th minute with a curler from the left corner of the penalty box.

Goals kept coming and four minutes later, Ibrahim made it 3-0 and Robson struck his campaign's eighth goal in the 43rd minute and stunned Maruful Haque's charges, who had beaten Abahani 3-2.

Following resumption, Ctg Abahani fared comparatively better but failed to cash in on the chances they created and further misery was in store for them after Kings' coach Oscar Bruzon introduced Iraqi defender Khalid Sheifi and forward Eleta Kingsley, who joined in the party by heading a cross from Ibrahim home in the 67th minute.

Meanwhile, heavyweights Abahani could not flourish like Kings with a single foreign recruit against Swadhinata even though the Sky Blues had taken the lead in the 39th minute when Nabib Newaj Jibon tapped in home after goalkeeper Sarwar Jahan deflected a shot from the Costa Rican striker Daniel Colindres.

Abahani, aspiring for a treble this season, went on to throw away their lead in the 80th minute when goalkeeper Shahidul Alam Sohel was unable to stop a powerful header from Iqbal Hussain after Polish forward Rafal Zaborowski whipped a free-kick from 35 yards.



Bashundhara Kings players converge on each other following a goal against Chittagong Abahani during their Bangladesh Premier League fixture at the Kings Arena yesterday. The defending champions thrashed the port city outfit 5-0 to extend their lead at the top of the table.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED