

## SL committed to BD tour

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh cricket team will arrive in the country in three separate batches following their tour of South Africa, with the first batch of cricketers due on Wednesday morning. The remaining groups will arrive on Thursday morning and afternoon respectively.

Having clinched a historic ODI series 2-1, Bangladesh struggled in the two-Test series, slumping to a 220-run loss in the first Test and a 332-run loss in the second.

But there will be a little time for recuperation before the Tigers gear up for their next international assignment, a two-Test series against Sri Lanka at home in May.

The present financial crisis in Sri Lanka has seen Bangladesh's HP's tour to the country postponed for the time being, but the national team's assignment is scheduled to go ahead as planned with the first Test slated to be played on May 15 at Chattogram's Zahir Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium.

"Regarding the national team's assignment, we are in communication with them and they are fully committed to their schedule of touring Bangladesh," BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury told reporters yesterday.

Following a recent ICC board meeting, BCB are hopeful of hosting events and also playing against the big sides once the new FTP rolls out. Global events for the next eight years had already been published but bilateral and other international tournament schedules are yet to be announced.

"We are expecting since we made a few requests regarding hosting events and are working towards those. We are hopeful," Nizamuddin said.

Bangladesh have not toured Australia and England in recent times but the BCB are positive that it will change in the next FTP cycle. "We have talked to the relevant boards to resolve these issues and have received positive indications. Hopefully when the next FTP comes, that will be reflected," the BCB CEO said.



## 'We can't defend anymore'

EKUSH TAPADER

The disastrous Test series against South Africa saw Bangladesh's ability to face spinners called into question and while former left-arm spinner Enamul Haque Jr. emphasised the need to balance things out with more spin-friendly wickets at the domestic level, Nazmul Abedin Fahim, a mentor to many leading cricketers, shone a spotlight on the batters' inability to face spinners on the international stage.

"Those who are in the national team squad right now have less training when it comes to playing spinners. Not getting to play in the national league due to international commitments is a big reason for that. Furthermore, we are now focusing on making domestic wickets flatter and more seam-friendly, which creates a gap in terms of facing spinners. Consequently, we are suffering in the Tests," Enamul began.

"But we need to have a balance in the number of wickets," he added. "One wicket should be spin-friendly and another should be for pacers. But that has not been happening. The emphasis now is to have more grass on the pitch. Of course, that helps the seamers, but we have to make balance things out for spinners at the same time so that batters get more experience of playing the spin," Enamul added.

The former spinner believes that more

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NAZMUL ABEDIN FAHIM

red-ball cricket in the domestic format would help batters be more efficient in the Test arena.

"Our preparation with the red ball should come from National Cricket League or BCL. I don't think it's that big a problem. We grew up playing spin. So if we dedicate enough time, train properly and increase the number of four-day cricket with the red ball, the batters can work more on defending spin. I think we can overcome the situation. We know how to play the spin, it's just a lack of preparation," he concluded.

Meanwhile, Nazmul Abedin Fahim illustrated the contrast between the conditions of wickets at home and in

South Africa.

"The wickets they played on are not similar to the spinning wickets we have at home. Over there, the ball not only turns after it drops, but the pace and bounce also pose a big challenge to our batters. We don't usually face spinners in such conditions because pacers dominate," Fahim said before speaking about the need to improve mentally.

"Another thing we can work on is the mental aspect. I think there is a barrier when we face situations that are outside our comfort zone. We will not always find ourselves in favourable situations. Hence, we need to work on our skills and mentality even when we are uneasy," he added.

Defending may be an important facet of Test cricket, but Fahim believes the defensive skills of the Bangladesh batters is unreliable.

"Our defence is not just weak; we can't defend anymore. If I say the defence is weak, that means there is some form of defending. But I don't have any faith in our defence. So, the only way we can do something is through attacking because we know we can't stay at the crease for a long time. It's a form of surrender."

"If we can't produce batters who are capable of playing spin, there are no easy solutions. We might be in danger if we do not resolve it. And Sri Lanka may capitalise on that weakness against us in the next series," Fahim concluded.

## Women's domestic longer-version cricket in works

SPORTS REPORTER

There was good news for women cricketers as the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) unveiled plans to roll out a longer version domestic tournament to better prepare the Tigresses for international Test assignments.

Bangladesh's women's side were granted Test status last year after the ICC decided that Test and ODI status would be permanently awarded to all women's teams that were full members.

While there were expectations that the Tigresses would play their first Test in 2021, one year has passed and the wait will be extended to next year. "The Test was not supposed to happen this year. What we said was that since Test status was awarded, we would first start domestic games within two years. Then we would move to internationals. This year we have a plan to start two-day domestic games, instead of wholly rolling out the longer version format (four-day matches). We are looking into possibilities," BCB director and women's wing chairman Shaiful Alam Chowdhury Nadel told The Daily Star yesterday.

The number of teams are yet to be decided but the BCB wants to get the tournament off the ground on a small scale. "We will try to begin this year and it will depend on our schedule. If we can't begin this year, it will happen at the start of next year," Nadel confirmed.

The tournament, even if held in a small scale, will improve morale before the Tigresses' first international Test.

## Naeem drives unstoppable Legends

SPORTS REPORTER

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's Legends of Rupganj continued their winning run by picking up their sixth consecutive victory with an 83-run win over Brothers Union in yesterday's Dhaka Premier League (DPL) match at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium.

Rupganj's Naeem Islam, who was in charge of the side before Mashrafe took over, has been the most consistent performer in the league with the bat and is currently the second-highest run-getter with 669 runs at an average of 83.6, only bettered by Anamul Haque Bijoy.

Struggling at 58 for 5, Naeem starred with the bat again with a fighting 45 as he strung together an 81-run stand with Shabbir Rahman, who struck 46 off 50 deliveries. Brothers' pacer Ifran Hossain scalped a four-wicket haul as Rupganj were eventually bowled out for 168 in 44.1 overs. However, Naeem and Chirag Jani made short work of Brothers, with the former finishing with four for 22 and the latter picking up three wickets. Brothers were bundled out for just 85 runs.

Meanwhile, in a rain-curtailed match between Khelaghar Samaj Kallyan Samity and Shinepukur Cricket Club at BKSP, the latter won by four wickets. Alauddin Babu and Ripon Mondol picked up four and two wickets respectively to restrict Khelaghar to 216 for eight in 33 overs. Avishek Mitra's 56-ball 62 and Tahjibul Islam's 25-ball 40 helped Shinepukur to their fourth win.

## Simeone brushes off criticism

Klopp full of confidence

REUTERS

Atletico Madrid won't deviate from their usual style despite heavy criticism when they host Manchester City in the second leg of their Champions League quarter-final this week, coach Diego Simeone said on Tuesday.

After losing last week's first leg 1-0 with an overly defensive gameplan that yielded no attempts on goal, Atletico received plenty of criticism, including from former coach Arrigo Sacchi, who called it "prehistoric soccer, from the '60s."

"Loose lips sink ships," Simeone told a news conference when asked about Sacchi's comments.

"I've been coaching since 2005-06 and I prefer to always respect my colleagues. But that is always former players or coaches that decide to run their mouths to get people's attention. I just ignore them."

Simeone said that his team, who reached Champions League finals in 2014 and 2016, have an identity and will stick with it, despite having to win Wednesday's game to qualify for the semi-finals.

"We're up against a team that plays very well. A very good positional game, but we're hopeful. It's clear that hope alone isn't enough, but we're going to try to take the game where we can hurt them," the Argentine added.

"Words don't say much, the important thing is what happens after the game starts."

Atletico captain Koke echoed his coaches

comments and insisted that the squad revelled in their tough, rugged playing style.

"We have been playing like this for a decade and we enjoy it," the midfielder said.

"We have a plan and we will always be within this plan. We know how City plays, you can't give them space. Let people say what they want. We play the way we play, we have our plan and we are going to continue playing the way we play despite what the pundits suggest."

Meanwhile, Liverpool's goal is to become a team nobody wants to face, manager Juergen Klopp said on Tuesday ahead of their Champions League quarter-final second leg against Benfica at Anfield.

Liverpool lead 3-1 after victory in Lisbon last week and Klopp's side are in a rich vein of form having lost only once in their last 22 games in all competitions, winning 18 times.

"We were good in Benfica, I liked the game. The main target is again being the one team no one wants to play," Klopp told reporters ahead of Wednesday's clash.

"Really aggressive in a football sense, defending well, knowing more about the way they play."

Klopp said the game would be as tricky as their last-16 second leg against Inter Milan, when they lost 1-0 after a 2-0 win in the first leg.

"A good basis (3-1 lead). But if they score one, like we felt against Inter, the game changes," Klopp said. "We felt it when they scored last week. We really need to make them feel this is a place they don't want to go."



With a 1-0 deficit from the first leg and with coach Diego Simeone coming under heavy criticism for his style of football, Atletico Madrid will tonight look to overturn the deficit and silence the critics when they host English champions Manchester City at the Wanda Metropolitano.

PHOTO: AFP/REUTERS

## What to WATCH

T SPORTS & STAR SPORTS 1

IPL

Mumbai vs Punjab

Live from 08:00 pm

TEN 1

UEFA Champions League

Liverpool vs Benfica

Live from 01:00 am (Thursday)

TEN 2

UEFA Champions League

Atletico Madrid vs Manchester City

Live from 01:00 am (Thursday)