

'We can bring some joy to Sri Lanka'

AFP, Colombo

Australia's cricketers hope to bring some "joy" to Sri Lanka, white-ball captain Aaron Finch said on Friday, as the island nation prepares for a seven-week tour while wrestling with an unprecedented economic crisis.

The squad arrived Wednesday for their first all-format series against Sri Lanka in six years, at a time when fuel shortages, rolling blackouts and political turmoil have made life a misery for many.

The tour has raised security concerns in the Australian camp after deadly unrest in Sri Lanka last month, but Finch said his team were excited to be in the country.

"We're here to play cricket and hopefully... we can bring some joy and some entertainment to Sri Lanka," he told an online press conference.

"It's such a special place to tour. The hospitality



that you get here, the friendliness, and their love for the game is unbelievable," he said.

Australia will play three Twenty20 internationals, five one-day internationals and two Test matches during the tour, which ends July 12.

The series-opening Twenty20 international will be played under lights on Tuesday in the capital Colombo, where residents have suffered through regular power cuts and waited in long queues for fuel.

Last month, Cricket Australia boss Todd Greenberg said players were aware of the situation in the island nation and admitted a "level of discomfort around touring in conditions that contrast those faced by the people of Sri Lanka".

Australia last toured the country in 2016 but has regularly played against Sri Lanka at home, including a Twenty20 international series in February that went 4-1 to the hosts.



Refined Joy looking to impress

SPORTS REPORTER

Mahmudul Hasan Joy's inclusion in the Test side could help could be the answer to Bangladesh's long search for an opening partner to Tamim Iqbal, with the youngster already showing glimpses of his ability in the longest format of the game.

The likes of Shadman Islam, Mohammad Naim and Saif Hasan were among others to be given opportunities, but nobody grabbed those chances until Mahmudul burst onto the scene. Joy provided insight into his patient mindset in just his second Test, facing 228 balls and scoring 78 in the historic Test win against New Zealand at Mount Maunganui in January this year.

The 21-year-old continued to impress, showing maturity beyond his years on way to registering his maiden Test hundred and the first by a Bangladesh batter against South Africa in March this year.

But although Joy scored a fifty in the first Test against Sri Lanka in Chattogram, the right-hander failed to have an impact on the second Test in Mirpur, where he was dismissed for naught and 15.

There were questions about Joy's lack of footwork from the start of his career and it came to the fore once again after Joy, with his feet rooted to the crease, was bowled by Rajitha delivery that went through the



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Mahmudul Hasan Joy

gate.

The Chandpur native worked on his batting with his childhood coach Syed Shameem Akhter Faruqi, working on his shuffling and head position, before travelling to the seam-friendly Caribbean for the first time.

"He worked on his own during the break and before travelling to West Indies and he shared something about

his batting that he wanted to work on. He worked on his shuffling and said that it was important for him to have good rhythm because otherwise it becomes difficult for him. Apart from that, I think he may have also worked on his head positioning to get more balance," Shameem told The Daily Star.

However, Joy's childhood mentor and the BCB-appointed Chandpur district coach was confident that Joy would score big on the upcoming West Indies tour.

"If you noticed his knocks in New Zealand and South Africa, he looked comfortable in seaming conditions and was able to adapt to the pace and bounce, that too in tough conditions. I am confident that he will be able to adapt well in the Caribbean too. His patience and ability to adapt quickly makes him a very intelligent cricketer," he added.

Before being among the first lot of Bangladeshi cricketers to travel to West Indies yesterday, the 21-year-old informed that he was looking to adjust to the seam-friendly conditions.

"I haven't planned anything. I'm just looking forward to giving my best one day at a time. I will look to adapt and adjust once I land in the Caribbean since this will be my first tour. I will be able to bat in the nets later and I am looking forward to it," Joy said at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka yesterday.

Upbeat Zico hoping to get points on the board

SPORTS REPORTER

Having recorded a creditable draw against Indonesia in a friendly, Bangladesh goalkeeper Anisur Rahman Zico was upbeat about the team's chances of getting a few points from their three Asian Cup Qualifiers matches in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

While there were concerns over Zico's performances in the Bangladesh Premier League and AFC Cup, the Bashundhara Kings goalkeeper put in a characteristic performance against

Indonesia, ranked 29 places ahead of Bangladesh in the FIFA Rankings, as he thwarted attacks until the final whistle.

"After playing against Indonesia, coach [Javier Cabrera] will be working on the positives and negatives from the match because he has still time ahead of the qualifiers," Zico said in a video message sent by the Bangladesh Football Federation.

"We are now preparing for the Asian Cup Qualifiers and are hoping to give our best so we can earn some points."

Bangladesh will begin their Group E campaign on June 8 by taking on Bahrain, who are ranked 89th in the world. They then face 134th-ranked Turkmenistan on June 11 ahead of the third and final group match against the 154th-ranked hosts.

"The players will definitely be trying to get points and we are hopeful of performing well," Zico added. Meanwhile, forward Mahbubur Rahman Sufil, who missed the Indonesia match due to problems with his passport, joined the squad yesterday.



Mitchell, Blundell lead NZ revival

REUTERS, London

A 72-run partnership between Daryl Mitchell and Tom Blundell helped New Zealand stretch their lead over England to 119 runs at tea on the second day of a low-scoring first Test at Lord's on Friday.

New Zealand were 128-4 in the second innings before the end of the afternoon session, having been bundled out for 132 in the first innings.

All-rounder Mitchell (43 not out) struck five boundaries in a formidable batting display, which came as a relief to the Black Caps who crumbled against England's fast bowlers in the first innings.

After wickets tumbled on the opening day and the first session on day two, there was a sense of calm in the afternoon as New Zealand lost just one wicket and finally found a firm batting partnership.

The reigning world test champions, who were 38-3 at lunch, lost Devon Conway (13) in the 23rd over of the second innings after the returning Stuart Broad strangled him down legside.

Conway's departure brought an end to his 9.3 overs-partnership with Mitchell, which looked promising.

Mitchell, nonetheless, combined well with wicket-keeper batsman Blundell (39 not out) as the visitors kept the Test evenly poised ahead of the final session on day two.

Mitchell and Blundell's sturdy middle-order partnership forced new captain Ben Stokes to introduce spin as Matthew Parkinson, brought in as a concussion replacement for Jack Leach, bowled in the longest format for England for the first time.



Swiatek's second or Gauff's first?

REUTERS, Paris

Iga Swiatek is one step away from a second French Open title in three years but the world number one will face a unique challenge on Saturday in teenager Coco Gauff in a tournament that often proved unpredictable.

Poland's Swiatek is on a remarkable 34-match winning streak and could lift the 2020 Roland Garros champion lift the Suzanne Leglen Cup again, she will match Venus Williams's run from 2000 - the longest on the women's tour in the 2000s.

Her final record is also impressive as the 21-year-old has won the last eight finals she has played, losing more than four games only twice in those matches.

She has a unique game, with her light footwork, powerful forehand and unsettling slice proving a nightmare to handle as her opponents during this fortnight have realised.

Swiatek has only dropped one set and showed occasional signs of nerves before steamrolling Daria Kasatkina in the semi-finals in an awe-inspiring demonstration of mastery.

Nerves have often been a deciding factor in finals but there is little chance



that Swiatek, who has been working with a psychologist, will struggle with her composure.

"I'm just trying to treat these (final) matches as any other matches, because it is stressful, and I accept that. But I want to keep doing the same work," she said.

"It's been going on well. I'm also aware sometimes my opponents are stressed so I'm trying to kind of realise that and not panic about my own stress."

"Remembering why I got here and what my strengths are, this is really helping me. So I think it's all about the mindset and the preparation I have

before the match."

On the other side of the net is an 18-year-old who has developed into a solid claycourt player and will play her second final here after winning the juniors title in 2018.

It will be her first Grand Slam final on the main tour, but Gauff, seeded 18th, insists, she will go into the contest without any pressure.

"I think going in I have nothing to lose and she's definitely the favourite going into the match on paper," said Gauff, who lost her two encounters against Swiatek in straight sets.

"But I think that going in, I'm just going to play free and play my best tennis. I think in a Grand Slam final anything can happen."

Chris Evert, an 18-time Grand Slam champion and Eurosport tennis expert, believes Gauff is one of the rare players who can derail Swiatek.

"To me, the only player who can beat Swiatek is a player with a lot of firepower and a big serve," she explained.

"At this point, that's the way it's looking. Coco Gauff is the only type of player, and type of game, that can really overpower Iga at this point."

Italy look to get back on the horse

AGENCIES

After the disappointment of the Finalissima against Argentina, Italy will be glad to quickly get back on the horse against another giant of world football when they take on Germany in their Nations League opener tonight.

Since winning the Euros, the Azzurri have had a hard time of it by failing to qualify for the World Cup before a humbling Finalissima defeat to Argentina.

However, Italy have not defeat Die Mannschaft in very nearly a decade.

The glory days of EURO 2022 feel far removed right now, and a good start to the Nations League would be just what the doctor ordered.

Germany will have other plans as they aim to continue their unbeaten streak under Hans-Dieter Flick, who oversaw eight consecutive wins before drawing against the Netherlands in March.