

Afridi boost for Pakistan

REUTERS

Pakistan have been handed a major boost ahead of the Twenty20 World Cup in Australia with pace spearhead Shaheen Afridi set to join the team for warm-up games against England and Afghanistan, the country's cricket board (PCB) said on Tuesday.

Afridi, 22, has been sidelined since sustaining a ligament injury to his right knee during a test match in Sri Lanka in July, missing the Asia Cup and home series against England.

"Shaheen is now available for selection for the 17 and 19 October warm-up matches against England and Afghanistan, respectively during which his match fitness will be assessed by the team management," the PCB said in a statement.

"I am super excited ... it has been a difficult period for me to be miles away from the game and the team I love the most," said Afridi, who was named in the 15-man squad in the hope that he would be fit in time for the tournament.

"I have been bowling six to eight overs trouble-free for the past 10 days with full run-up and pace."



Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan addresses his teammates during a pre-practice session huddle in Christchurch on Tuesday, ahead of today's tri-nation series fixture against New Zealand. (Bottom) The Kiwis, meanwhile, thrashed Pakistan by nine wickets in yesterday's match.

PHOTO: BCB/AFP



Kuldeep leads India to series victory

REUTERS, New Delhi

Kuldeep Yadav led India's inspired spin bowling display by picking up four wickets to help the hosts skittle South Africa for 99 and set up a seven-wicket win in the deciding third and final one-day international in Delhi on Tuesday.

Opener Shubman Gill fell one run short of a deserved half-century as India knocked off their target in 19.1 overs, completing a 2-1 series victory after going down in the opening ODI of the series in Lucknow.

It was South Africa's lowest total in the 50-over format against India as the touring side were bundled out in just 27.1 overs after Shikhar Dhawan won the toss and opted to field.

Left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep finished with 4-18 while his fellow tweekers Washington Sundar and Shabbaz Ahmed picked up two wickets apiece to compound South Africa's misery.

Further experiments in store?

SPORTS REPORTER

Sridharan Sriram, Bangladesh men's T20 cricket team's technical consultant, pointed to experiments being part and parcel as the team approaches the World Cup despite stating the core of the team for the mega event is established. Sriram also mentioned that all efforts will be extended to Shakib Al Hasan to ensure it becomes 'his team', galvanised by the skipper's ability to keep the environment calm.

As Bangladesh take on New Zealand today in Christchurch, they do so while knowing that a defeat would throw them out of contention for a spot in the final. Both Pakistan and New Zealand have two wins while the Tigers, who have lost both their games so far, have two more matches to go.

Shakib, who missed the first match of the tournament, having been rested due to fatigue, will have to pull up his socks to get his team's confidence up before the upcoming assignments. Members of the Bangladesh team huddled around their skipper yesterday at Lincoln as Shakib tried to instil messages on a plan of action.

Bangladesh have, so far,

failed in their experiments with make-shift openers from both ends as Sabbir Rahman was dropped and Najmul Hossain Shanto took his place in the playing eleven during the last match on October 9 against New Zealand. Using make-shift openers is not

Sriram found plenty of positives so far and wanted to keep learning about the players' ability to carry out different roles.

"I think we want to keep experimenting by giving people different roles and different challenges. We keep



unheard of but the profiles being used as openers did not bear fruit from a tactical sense and Sriram opined more experiments will be made. It is at the top where Bangladesh have failed to grasp the tempo which saw them struggle to cope, and it remains to be seen if the management decides on keeping Mehedi Hasan Miraz as opener.

learning about them. There has been a lot of improvement shown. The middle-order has shown a lot of improvement.

"Middle-order with Shakib coming back becomes very strong. Afif [Hossain], Liton [Das], once they get going, we will have a very formidable batting line-up," he added.

Why Shakib has chosen to come down the order remains

unclear but there is a need to find solidity at the top. It will be interesting to see whether the skipper now comes further up the order to be able to dictate the innings better.

Sriram mentioned that it is in fact Shakib's team and the skipper has 'clear plans' on how to get into the right mould ahead of the World Cup. From that point of view, even if Bangladesh do not make the final, they have the scope to improve on their plans and Shakib holds the key to what the team can offer.

"Shakib is very calm. In international cricket we are bound to have ups and lows. I think we got to get steady through the ups and lows. Shakib has been brilliantly keeping this environment. He is taking the boys out, he is always chatting with them. He has very clear plans on how he wants to take his team forward. He has all our support. We just want him to let him run the team. It's his team and we will support him from all ends," Sriram said.

"We got the core squad that is really going to do well in the future and we look forward to the World Cup," he added as the team still looks for a firm footing in the T20I format.

Karwan Bazar lift U-16 title

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Karwan Bazar Pragati Sangha clinched the title of the BFF U-16 Football Tournament with a 3-0 win over Wari Club in Kamalapur on Tuesday.

Player-of-the-final Shahidul Mostafa struck on either side of Arif Hossain's solitary goal as Karwan Bazar emerged champions of the tournament, organised for the youth teams of the Bangladesh Championship League.

The winners surprised all to seal the trophy even though their senior team were relegated to the second division due to the club's involvement with online betting and fixing.

Arif of Karwan Bazar and Abu Bakkar Siddique of Forties FC became joint-highest scorers of the 11-team tournament, while Akash Islam of Wari Club was adjudged as the best player.

An unwanted end but one to learn from

SPORTS REPORTER

"The time to just play good cricket is over. As the trophy belonged to us, we hope we can retain it. And we have been playing good cricket. So the target will be to play good cricket and also win the trophy again."

A confident Bangladesh women's team skipper Nigar Sultana Joty had said before they began their Women's Asia Cup title defence earlier this month.

However, things did not pan out as the Tigresses had hoped. The defending champions crashed out of the continental championship from the first-round league stage, unable to even book a spot in the semifinals.

For the Tigresses, rain was the biggest threat on their way to the semifinals on Tuesday as their game against the UAE was called off at around 10:53am due to incessant showers.

A win against the UAE in their last round-robin fixture would have ensured Bangladesh a last-four spot, given their superior net run rate over Thailand but rain enforced a complete washout without a ball bowled at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium.

Having shared a point each in the final game against the UAE, Bangladesh finished fifth in the seven-team competition with five points from two wins in six matches while Thailand, who have six



points from six matches, went into the semifinals alongside six-time champions India as well as Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

The hosts had beaten Thailand and Malaysia but lost their matches against India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka – the stronger sides in this competition. And all these matches highlighted the discernible shortcomings that have long persisted in the Tigresses' batting department.

The most horrible of their batting collapses was against Sri Lanka on Monday when, chasing just a modest 41-run target in seven overs during a curtailed-over contest, Bangladesh lost four wickets in one over and eventually found themselves three runs short of the target.

In fact, that defeat had seen the Tigresses leave it to the outcome of their final game against the UAE to decide their way forward in this competition.

"Actually, we squandered our opportunity the day before [on Monday against Sri Lanka]. We can't pin the blame on the weather. If we had won against Sri Lanka, we would not have to worry about today's [Tuesday's] outcome. This is really upsetting," the BCB women's cricket wing chairman Shaiful Alam Chowdhury Nadel told The Daily Star.

Bangladesh also faltered when asked to chase a steep 160-run target against India. With lack of experience in chasing such a big target, Bangladesh were unable to pace the innings and eventually saw the required rate sky rocket to almost 12 an over.

In that game against India, the Tigresses could only muster 100 for seven in 20 overs.

Before that, the Tigresses were hammered by nine wickets in their game against Pakistan. However, much of the blame for that thrashing was attributed to a slow and unsporting wicket at the Ground 2 of the Sylhet stadium.

With toss not taking place in yesterday's game, an official press conference was not mandatory. However, the dejected Tigresses were not even willing to speak even when reached out by the media.

It was learned that they directly left for the hotel from the dressing room soon after the match was officially called off.

What remains to be seen is how Bangladesh, who beat India in the final of the last edition four years ago, pick themselves up and address their issues, especially in the batting department.



Lautaro Martinez will spearhead Inter Milan's attack as the Italian giants look to do a double over Barcelona, who, however, will hope to come out with a positive result at Nou Camp tonight to stay in contention for the knockout phases of the Champions League.

PHOTO: TWITTER



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