



**Bangladesh Test and T20I captain Shakib Al Hasan dropped in at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur during the Tigers' training session on Tuesday ahead of their one-off Test against Afghanistan from June 14. The champion cricketer was in a light mood, sharing a laugh or two with head coach Chandika Hathurusingha at the outer nets. Shakib, who returned from the USA after spending time with his family, was ruled out of the Afghanistan Test due to a finger injury picked up during the Tigers' previous series against Ireland last month. The 36-year-old is going through rehabilitation and is expected to be fit for the three ODIs and two T20Is against the Afghans next month. "He [Shakib] doesn't have any problem in his fingers. Usually it takes four weeks to recover from such an injury. A few weeks passed and maybe about a week of rehab is left. He is probably getting ready," national team selector Habibul Bashar said of Shakib's injury yesterday.**

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Milan sans a Maldini after 45 years

AGENCIES

According to reports in Italy, a number of AC Milan stars are unhappy with owner Gerry Cardinale's decision to sack club legend Paolo Maldini.



During a meeting late on Monday night that was scheduled to discuss the club's plans for the future, Cardinale informed Maldini, serving as technical director, and sporting director Ricky Massara that their services would no longer be required.

Maldini had come out after AC Milan's defeat in the Champions League semifinal to Inter Milan and said that the club owners knew the team they had assembled was incapable of competing in multiple tournaments. The decision, which comes despite Milan reaching the final four of Europe's elite competition and finishing fourth in Serie A, has started a 'revolt'.

Rafael Leao openly showed his surprise, posting a cryptic emoji on Twitter shortly after the news broke, with some reports stating the Portuguese would not have renewed his contract till 2028 if he had known this was coming. Yacine Adli posted a picture of Maldini on his profile.

The Maldini name has been a constant presence at the San Siro for the last 45 years, but with Paolo's departure and his son Daniel away at Spezia on loan, it is the first time since 1978 without a Maldini at Milan. Cesare, Paolo's father, had played for the club from 1954 to 1966. He then had various stints as a member of the coaching staff and served the club as a scout into the millennium, by which time Paolo was already a superstar.

## A chance to end 50-year drought

REUTERS

The Europa Conference League might be very much UEFA's third club competition but for West Ham United and Fiorentina, whose solitary European successes came over half a century ago, Wednesday's showdown is being treated like a World Cup final.

Fiorentina, who lost to Real Madrid in the second European Cup final in 1957, won the first edition of the now-defunct Cup Winners' Cup in 1961. They lost in the final the next season and lost to Juventus in a two-legged UEFA Cup final in 1990.

West Ham won the Cup Winners' Cup in 1965 for their only moment of continental glory. They lost in the 1976 final and the closest they have come since, excluding the 1999 Intertoto Cup victory, was last season's Europa League semifinals.

Overcoming that agonising defeat by Eintracht Frankfurt has been a driving force for the east London club this season, particularly once their Premier League survival was assured.

"I do believe the players have got a great opportunity to be remembered by everyone at this club," West Ham manager David Moyes said.

Forward Jarrod Bowen, who played in the semifinals last season, said Wednesday's match in Prague would be the biggest of his career.

"I've played for England, but I think achieving this with your team mates who you've been with together to get to a final and you have the opportunity to win a trophy together, it will be a massive moment and for the fans it would mean so much," he said.

# WTC final takes centre stage amid T20 boom

AFP, London

The World Test Championship final between Australia and India at the Oval starts Wednesday against a backdrop of fears for the long format given the growth of Twenty20 franchise leagues.

Not that there's anything new about cricket-lovers worrying about the future of their sport.

year cycle of games culminating in a final, in order to give Test cricket greater context.

This week's match marks the culmination of the second edition, with New Zealand having defeated India in the inaugural 2021 final at Southampton.

Australia and India are two of cricket's major on and off-field powers, together with England, and the 'Big Three' play the



One current concern is that the riches on offer to leading players from T20 tournament such as the Indian Premier League, and the vastly shorter time it takes to earn the money than by playing five-day Test cricket, makes the traditional format of the game much less attractive to leading modern-day players.

The International Cricket Council's response was to devise the WTC, a two-

majority of five-match Test series.

The proximity of the first Ashes Test at Edgbaston starting on June 16 has led to the WTC final being labelled a "warm-up" game for Australia.

But Australia star batter Steve Smith, whose side just missed out on the inaugural final, after losing their last home series India, is adamant it is a match his side want to win just as much as a 50-

over or T20 World Cup final.

"We're all just looking forward to this (match against India)," Smith told reporters at the Oval on Monday.

And India coach Rahul Dravid said: "It's something you aspire to, to be in the top two teams so you get an opportunity to play this game."

Early season surfaces in England generally do not give spinners much help and India skipper Rohit Sharma said the Oval pitch and the overhead conditions looked as though they would assist seam bowlers.

"When we played the last Test match here at the Oval, it looked very similar to this and then as the game went on, it got better and better and slower and slower, then the reverse-swing came into play on the fifth day," Rohit said during a pre-match press conference at the Oval on Tuesday.

"We are going to consider all those factors."

Rohit, however, was tight-lipped on whether star spinner Ravichandran Ashwin would feature in the final.

The last time India played a Test at the London ground, in 2021, they left out Ashwin despite the star off-spinner's excellent record -- 474 wickets at 23.93 in 92 matches. They had instead opted for spin-bowling all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja.

Both bowlers are in India's 15-man squad for the WTC final.

"In terms of the combination, better we wait until tomorrow (Wednesday) -- that's a common answer, I think," Rohit said with a smile.



**World number two Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus powered past Ukraine's Elina Svitolina 6-4, 6-4 in a politically-charged clash on Tuesday to reach the French Open semifinals. The match was an intriguing prospect with Svitolina refusing to shake hands with players from Russia or Belarus following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine last year, which Russia calls a 'special military operation'.**

PHOTO: REUTERS

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

"Bhai, don't say anything," one cricketer requested as he and a few members of the national team came off their running exercise, sensing that the query was regarding the intense weather.

Fatigue was vividly written across his face. The weather has been intense for the past week and yesterday afternoon, it 'felt' like 47 degrees. In this intense heat, load management will be key for the BCB and they felt that the changes they were making would make a difference.

"We will have to play a Test match in this weather so it is about preparing," selector Habibul Bashar told The Daily Star.

Heading to a World Cup and given the heat, managing the pacers' workload is pivotal. So how does the BCB's current load management system work?

"It's a software-based program. Either the players or the ones supervising them inputs the data. It is especially used for pace bowlers. It has existed for a number of years but the software has been updated. We input the number of overs a bowler has sent down in a day. The basic rule we use is the seven-four-two rule. It means in seven days, you can bowl four days and you can't bowl for more than two days on the trot," BCB chief physician Debashish Chowdhury told The Daily Star.

Red and green are the colour codes used, with red suggesting a player has either exceeded his workload or has had an inadequate workload within a given

timeframe while green means a player has fulfilled their optimal number of overs before a match.

Taskin, who is still in recovery mode following an injury, had not bowled a day before yesterday, in accordance with the seven-four-two rule. Will the same standards be used for every player?



"Yes, it is a standardised system so it is the same for everyone irrespective of age, height, weight. The seven-four-two rule is just a guideline. It can be used loosely during tournaments," Debashish informed. "We have Players of National Interest (PONI), who are under the umbrella of load management," he added.

Taskin was included in the squad for the one-off Test against Afghanistan on June 14, but he will now need to meet a certain workload before being declared fully ready.

"If you have to bowl in a Test, you have to carry a certain workload. If you don't have the optimal numbers, you could be in trouble. If the workload is high, there is also a risk. Taskin is fully fit medically, but he has not had enough of a workload and bowled optimally, so maybe he won't reach optimum numbers before the Afghanistan Test. There could be a risk but the coach is there to take the decision on his inclusion," Debashish said.

GPS trackers are being introduced from the Afghanistan series. "It is also a load management tool, used to see how much a player is moving. We haven't used it before. We have foreign staff who are overseeing these technologies. Due to that, we are also ensuring our own staff is not being overworked. We didn't have these documentations like Australia or England did before," he added.

What remains to be seen now is whether Taskin reaches his optimal workload requirement. He had been sought out to play the County Championship season for Yorkshire County but did not want to go, BCB cricket operations chairman Jalal Yunus informed yesterday. "He was talking to us but with the World Cup coming up, both parties decided it would be better not to play for now," Jalal said.

"Yes, it was done with workload in mind. They have four-day and one-dayers which are very taxing. It would be too demanding," Bashar felt.

Taskin is the pace spearhead and managing his load can prove pivotal. As the BCB gains more of a foothold in managing this system, efficiency increases.