

Mahmudullah question looms ahead of squad announcement

SPORTS REPORTER

With Shakib Al Hasan named as the ODI captain yesterday, there was no obstruction left to announce the Bangladesh squad for the Asia Cup.

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) later conveyed in a press release that it would announce the team in a press conference at 9:30 am today at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium. Earlier, BCB president Nazmul Hassan had informed the same while announcing the ODI skipper.

"I haven't talked to selectors but from what I know they are supposed to give the squad tomorrow. They were facing an issue since announcing the squad without knowing who the captain will be, and without talking to the captain, would have been a problem," Hassan told reporters at his residence yesterday.

While the Asia Cup squad was also likely to be the World Cup squad, BCB may have to detach itself from that ploy due to Tamim Iqbal's injury to try out openers alongside Liton Das.

BCB president also relayed that the Asia Cup squad is almost close to being sorted. He identified that four or five pacers would be picked along with three spinners. Hassan also did not see much options in terms of tinkering with the available names that were called to the camp.

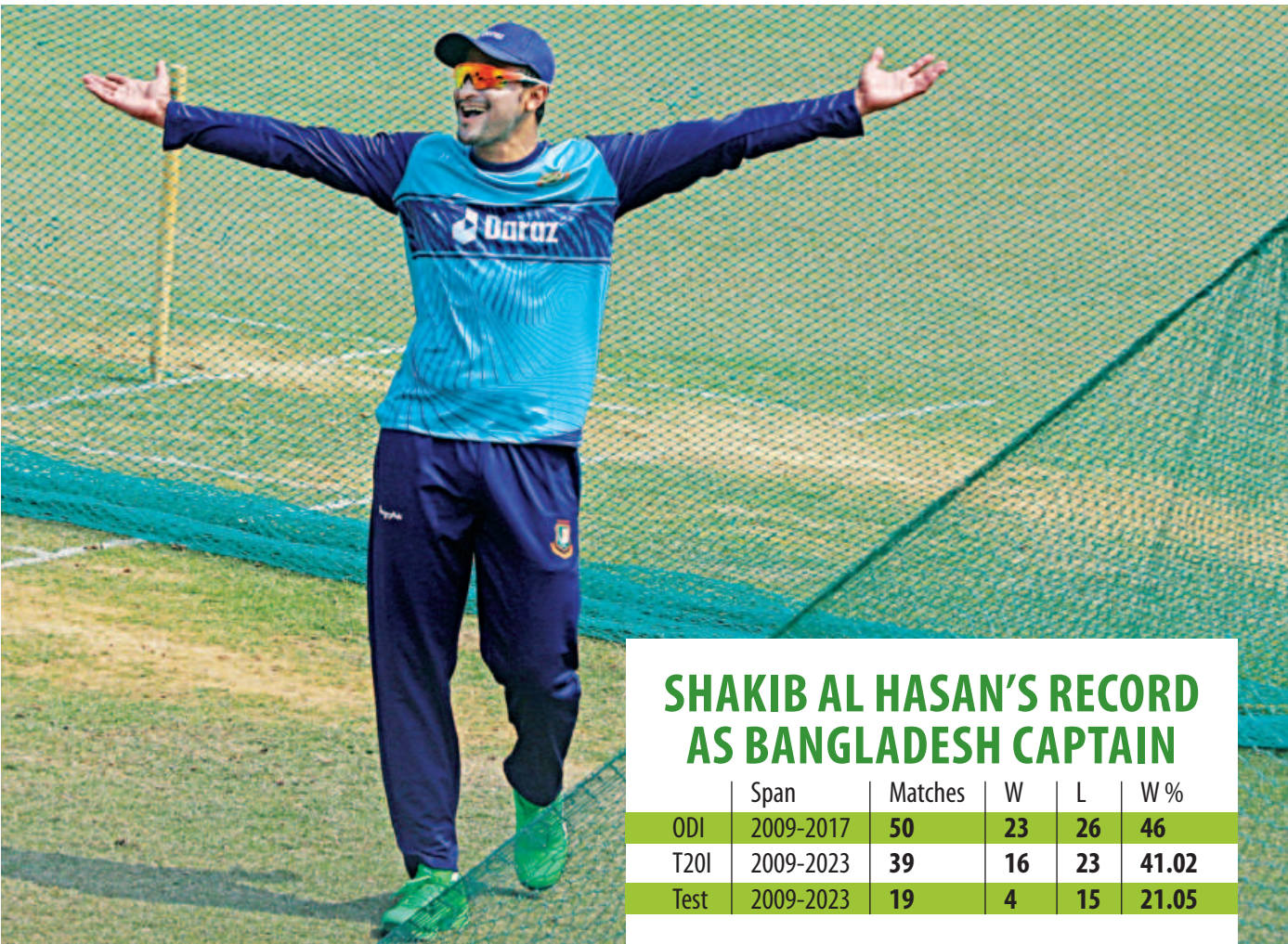
"We will take four pacers from the five we have or it could be that five pacers are included. We have to name a 17-member squad. Miraz is there [alongside Shakib] and we must take an extra spinner. Taijul and Nasum are available and since it's limited-over format, Nasum has a better chance," Hassan said.

Bar the usual names, the opening slot replacements for Tamim and the inclusion of Mahmudullah Riyad were the biggest questions hanging in balance following Shakib's captaincy announcement. Riyad's inclusion in the 2019 World Cup was previously questioned after a reported dressing room bust-up with Shakib.

With Shakib now in charge, whether Riyad's chances of inclusion diminish is what is being debated in the country's cricket fraternity. The board was supposed to name a 22-member squad initially but BCB president suggested a few players outside the 17-member squad he thought was probable. A member of the selection panel said they "would name as many players as is asked".

"Afif [Hossain], Mahmudullah and Shamim [Hossain] are there [outside of the 17-member squad]. My 17-member [squad] is done. Maybe we may have to include them and Mosaddek [Hossain] is also there," Hassan said.

In terms of new faces, the selectors had seen promise in Tanzid Hasan Tamim. Meanwhile, Soumya Sarkar or Mohammad Naim may also be up for inclusion as opening slot options.



SHAKIB AL HASAN'S RECORD AS BANGLADESH CAPTAIN

	Span	Matches	W	L	W %
ODI	2009-2017	50	23	26	46
T20I	2009-2023	39	16	23	41.02
Test	2009-2023	19	4	15	21.05

'SHAKIB WAS THE OBVIOUS CHOICE'

SPORTS REPORTER

There was no surprise as Shakib Al Hasan was named the ODI captain for the upcoming Asia Cup and World Cup yesterday, the only surprise was how it was announced.

Ending all speculation, Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan announced the name of the ODI captain under unconventional circumstances. Consequently, a large part of the media was left in the dark for some time about whether the unofficial press



of all three formats for Bangladesh and will lead the Tigers in the World Cup, even though Hassan clarified that discussions have not been extensive. The BCB president argued that, most importantly as a senior star, it was Shakib's ability to cope with pressure that made him pick the all-rounder as captain.

"Shakib Al Hasan will captain in both Asia Cup and World Cup. But we haven't discussed long-term plans regarding captaincy with Shakib. When he returns to the country, we will do that. We need to know our long-term and his plans as well. Actually, captaining in three formats will put a burden on him too," Hassan said yesterday, suggesting that they would discuss Shakib's T20I and Test captaincy once the all-rounder returns from his Lanka Premier League stint.

The BCB president reiterated that they will discuss the options on whether he wants to stay captain in all three formats, whether he wants to be at the helm long-

term or short term, or whether he wants to drop captaincy of one format and focus on the other two.

This would be Shakib's second stint as skipper, having served as captain previously between 2009 to 2011. He has also served sporadically since that period, captaining in three games, the last of which came in 2017 against Ireland.

Hassan argued that they were in a precarious spot after Tamim Iqbal stepped down on August 3.

"Before the Asia Cup and World Cup, with so little time left, I felt Shakib was the obvious choice.

"I have heard that many are saying that there was a lack of planning or whatever. What plan could we make? Who will retire when and then come back, can anyone make plans on that beforehand?"

Given that the World Cup is an enormous event, the board did not see any other option bar Shakib.

"World Cup pressure is not the same as pressure of a bilateral series. There is no one else apart from Shakib to take that pressure," he added.

Hassan felt positive that despite his earlier reservation, Shakib was serious about the objectives coming up.

"There's no doubt about his potential. One thing I feel very good about, in recent times... watching over the last one year... is that I had doubts about Shakib. It's my personal opinion, as to how serious he is and what game he will play or not play... Now I see there is none more serious than him about cricket."

Club Eagles land, Kings to fly out

SPORTS REPORTER

Club Eagles of Maldives reached Sylhet yesterday, three days before their official arrival, to play the in a preliminary fixture of the AFC Cup against Abahani later this week.

It will be the second AFC Cup appearance for Maldivian outfit, who got a walkover against Abahani in 2021 centring a dilemma over the venue, following their victory over Thimphu City of Bhutan in the Preliminary Round-1 match.

Abahani, who failed to cross the preliminary or play-off hurdles in the last three editions, either fell to Indian or Maldivian clubs since qualifying for the zonal semifinals in 2019.

Club Eagles, who have five foreign players in their roster, are expected to start their training today at Sylhet BKSP ground while Abahani will have their first training in Sylhet on August 14. The match will be played at Sylhet District Stadium on August 16.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Premier League champions Bashundhara Kings are all set to leave the country for United Arab Emirates this morning to take part in their maiden AFC Champions League appearance.

An approximately 50-member contingent with six foreign players – Robson Da Silva, Dorielson Gomes, Miguel Figueira, Asror Gafurov, Shokhrukhbek Kholmatov, Boburbek Yuldashov and Charles Didier – along with new local signings including Mohammad Ibrahim, Mojibur Rahman Jonny and Aminur Rahman Sajib – will play their match against Sharjah FC on August 15 at the Sharjah Stadium.

If the four-time Bangladesh Premier League winners can beat Sharjah FC, they will take on Iranian outfit Tractor FC in the play-off stage on August 22 in bid to get into the group stage of the competition.



Kane's Bayern move 'imminent', says Spurs boss

AFP, London

Harry Kane is on the brink of a move to Bayern Munich, Tottenham manager Ange Postecoglou confirmed on Friday.

The two clubs have reportedly agreed a fee worth an initial 100 million euros (\$110 million, £86 million) for the 30-year-old striker, who had just one year left on his contract at Spurs.

Kane has been given permission to travel to Germany to complete a medical ahead of what would be a record transfer for a Bundesliga club.

Postecoglou is preparing to take charge of his first game in charge of Tottenham at Brentford on Sunday and said he is now planning on life without the club's all-time top goalscorer.

"My understanding is it has progressed to the point where it looks like it will happen," said Postecoglou at his pre-match press conference.

"From that perspective at least it gives us some clarity and we move forward without Harry."

Set pieces the secret to SWEDEN'S SUCCESS

REUTERS, Auckland

Sweden's rich run of goals from set pieces saw them squeeze out a 2-1 victory over Japan on Friday to set them up for a semi-final against Spain as they continue their chase for a long-awaited first World Cup triumph.

Faced with one of the most formidable teams left in the tournament, Sweden dug deep in their bag of dead-ball tricks and, though they did not execute them as cleanly as in previous games, it was still enough to see them through.

A scramble after a free kick saw Amanda Ilestedt score her fourth goal of the tournament – all coming from set pieces – and a Jonna Andersson corner was handled in the box, allowing Filippa Angeldahl to rifle home the resulting penalty.

"What's going on? It's completely

crazy, completely crazy," Ilestedt told Swedish radio when asked about her red-hot scoring streak. "I'm happy as long as we're winning, but it's fun that the ball is going in too."

Sweden's dead-ball set-ups are often decided by assistant coach Magnus Wikman, who spends hours poring over ideas and then patiently drilling them with his players.

That collective effort has been their greatest source of success at the tournament – eight of their 11 goals coming from set pieces, either directly or after opponents failed to clear.

The Swedes successfully smothered Japan's fast-paced passing game in midfield. The Japanese side's best chances also came from set pieces but they missed a penalty and saw a free kick strike the bar and bounce on the line before spinning away.

Japan pulled a goal back in the 87th minute but it was too little, too late as Peter Gerhardsson's Sweden side played the percentages perfectly once again to set up a semi-final against Spain next Tuesday.

In doing so, the Swedes knocked out the 2011 champions and with the United States, Germany and Norway having already gone home, they ensured that whoever wins this enthralling World Cup will do so for the first time in their history.

Sweden's best result at the finals came in 2003, when they lost to Germany in the final, but this time they are aiming to go one better.

"Obviously we're not happy with a semi-final, we want to go the whole way," team captain Kosovare Asllani said. "I believe strongly in my team and we'll be more than ready for Tuesday."

