

# Pakistan look to match-winner Zaman against SL

AFP, Colombo

Pakistan bowling coach Morne Morkel on Wednesday said injuries to their premier quicks is a big blow ahead of a must-win Asia Cup match but a “fantastic opportunity” for up-and-coming talent.

Naseem Shah has been ruled out of the team’s final Super Four match – effective semi-final – against Sri Lanka in Colombo on Thursday, with Pakistan Super League star Zaman Khan coming in as replacement.

Naseem and fellow quick Haris Rauf were injured in the team’s previous Super Four clash of the 50-over tournament, a prelude to the upcoming ODI World Cup.

“A big blow, picking up those little niggles, but in this same sort of thing what a fantastic opportunity for the guys coming in,” Morkel told reporters.

“After going down against India, it’s a must-win game for us come tomorrow and I’m quite



Both Brazil and Argentina registered victories in their World Cup Qualifying fixtures on Tuesday to occupy the top two spots in the CONMEBOL region. While Argentina had a fairly comfortable job dispatching Bolivia at the high altitude of La Paz, thanks to goals from Enzo Fernandez (R), Nicolas Tagliafico and Nicolas Gonzalez, with Lionel Messi left unused, Brazil had to wait till the 90th minute before confirming victory through a Marquinhos header against Peru in Lima. Both teams have six points from two matches each, with Brazil leading the table on goal difference.

PHOTO: AFP



With a win-percentage of 59, Pakistan have a clear edge in terms of overall head-to-head results after having emerged winners in 92 of 155 outings. Sri Lanka won 58 times, while one game ended in a tie and four yielded no results.

Asia Cup records, however, stand heavily in favour of Sri Lanka as they boast an impressive win-percentage of 71.4, based on 10 victories in 14 fixtures.

The numbers are almost equal after 41 matches played in Sri Lanka as the hosts won 20 against Pakistan’s 18. Three encounters provided no result, two of which were staged in Colombo.

The last time Sri Lanka played Pakistan at home, they won by 165 runs in Hambantota in 2015. In their previous Asia Cup meeting -- in the 2014 edition’s final in Mirpur -- Sri Lanka secured a five-wicket victory.

excited to see the new guys stepping in, to see their character, to see how they respond.”

Zaman flew in from Pakistan and is already a popular name in national cricket after his heroics in this year’s PSL for champions Lahore Qalandars.

The 22-year-old is expected to make his ODI debut in a high-pressure match.

Shaheen Shah Afridi leads the Pakistan pace attack that rattled India in the Asia Cup group match, which was washed out after just innings.

But Shaheen and company took a hammering in their last meeting with India, who posted 356-2 in a match played across two days due to rain.

Critics have pointed at Pakistan’s lack of quality spinners, a major drawback on turning Sri Lankan wickets, but Morkel insists the slow bowlers remain ready to perform.

Rain could once again play spoilsport in Colombo today, with 93 percent chances of rain during the day and 48 percent during the night, as per Accuweather. Pakistan, however, will hope for the match to be completed as even a sharing of points will see Sri Lanka go through due to superior net run-rate.

# What are Tigers’ focus areas in NZ series?

SPORTS REPORTER

With Bangladesh already out of the Asia Cup despite having one game left to play against India on Friday, the emphasis would shift to making the most of their remaining assignments, mainly the New Zealand series at home, ahead of the upcoming World Cup in October.

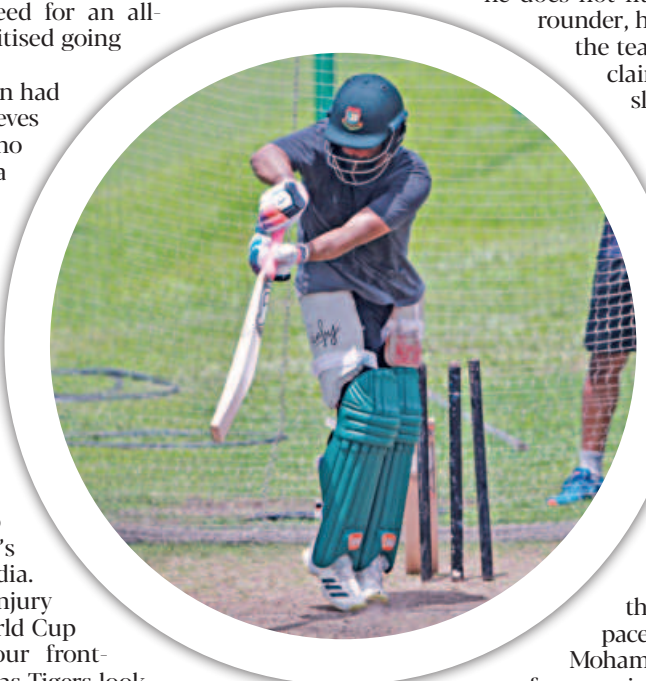
The Tigers have recently found it difficult to attain balance owing to injuries but what areas would the team management look at to find those that fit their World Cup plan? The need for an all-rounder may still be prioritised going forward.

Skipper Shakib Al Hasan had expressed that he believes quite a few players, who are already ensured of a place in the World Cup squad, may be rested. Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) cricket operations chairman, Jalal Yunus, told the media present at Sri Lanka on Tuesday that the head coach had already made plans on who to be rested.

The aspect of resting the fast bowlers also came up during Jalal’s interactions with the media. Since Ebadot Hossain’s injury forced him out of the World Cup squad, the remaining four front-line pacers may be rested as Tigers look for precautionary measures ahead of the marquee event.

“We have not made a decision regarding who will be rested, but we do have backup options if the pacers are rested,” a member of the selection panel informed yesterday.

The bigger focus would be the performance of the batters following batting collapses in Asia Cup. While the openers lacked runs – barring Mehedi Hasan Miraz, who played as a makeshift opener – the middle-order already bolsters the best available options in Shakib Al Hasan, Tawhid Hridoy and Mushfiqur Rahim. It is the lower



middle-order which has been the other big area in the batting department that needs improvement. However, balancing a team is where all-rounders also come into the equation.

While resting too many players could affect the balance of the side in the upcoming New Zealand series at home, two seasoned campaigners – Tamim Iqbal and Mahmudullah Riyad – may return to the side. Mahmudullah last played for the Tigers against England at home and although he does not fit the profile of a genuine all-rounder, his bowling has often balanced the team combination. Sources have claimed that Mahmudullah is slated for a return, and thus the team management can gauge available options.

No. 7 and 8 in the batting order have been key areas of concern in the Asia Cup. With Miraz playing as an opener, Shamim Hossain and Afif Hossain have failed to make their mark with the bat in the tournament while they do not provide a solid bowling option.

Meanwhile, the likes of Mosaddek Hossain, Mahedi Hasan and Soumya Sarkar could also present options with the ball. In absence of a genuine pace bowling all-rounder, with Mohammad Saifuddin rehabilitating from an injury, it remains to be seen if Soumya’s medium-pace bowling could see him get a nod ahead of the showpiece event in India.

The opening slot may need a backup opening option, in case Tamim Iqbal’s injury remains a concerning issue going into the World Cup. Shakib had spoken about finding one or two players in the coming series who could fit the team.

Thus, apart from veterans like Tamim or Mahmudullah finding their feet before the World Cup, and given no further injury setbacks, only one or two other positions will be on the team management’s agenda ahead of Bangladesh’s seventh World Cup mission.

# Afghanistan bring back Naveen

SQUAD

Hashmatullah Shahidi (captain), Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Ibrahim Zadran, Riaz Hassan, Rahmat Shah, Najibullah Zadran, Mohammad Nabi, Ikram Alikhil, Azmatullah Omarzai, Rashid Khan, Mujeeb Ur Rahman, Noor Ahmad, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Abdul Rahman, Naveen-ul-Haq

AFP, Kabul

Afghanistan recalled fast bowler Naveen-ul-Haq in the 15-man World Cup squad announced Wednesday, but allrounder Gulbadin Naib was dropped despite recent good performance.

Naib, 32, led Afghanistan in the last World Cup held in England four years ago where the team lost all nine matches and he was sacked.

But the medium pacer took seven wickets in the last three ODIs, including 4-60 against Bangladesh in the Asia Cup encounter in Lahore last week.

Naveen played the last of his seven ODIs against Ireland in January 2021.

Hashmatullah Shahidi leads the squad that has four changes following a two-match loss in the Asia Cup and a 3-0 series wipe out against Pakistan in Sri Lanka.

Besides Naib, also out are Karim Janat, Sharafuddin Ashraf and Suliman Safi.



England batter Ben Stokes smashes one during his record-breaking 182-run knock off 124 deliveries against New Zealand during the third ODI at The Oval in London yesterday. The innings featuring 15 fours and nine sixes helped Stokes set the highest individual ODI innings by an English player, beating the previous record of 180 runs by Jason Roy against Australia in 2018 as England posted 368 all out in 48.1 overs.

PHOTO: REUTERS



Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan speaks to his teammates following a training session in Colombo yesterday, the day after reaching the Sri Lanka capital following a three-day leave for a visit to Dhaka. Bangladesh, already out of contention for the Asia Cup final, will play their last game on Friday against India, who have already booked a final spot.

PHOTO: BCB

# Mushfiqur to skip India game

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh wicketkeeper-batter Mushfiqur Rahim will be skipping the Tigers’ third and final Super Four game of the ongoing Asia Cup against India on Friday due to personal reasons, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) informed in a media release yesterday.

The Tigers are already out of the tournament following India’s 41-run win against Sri Lanka on Tuesday.

Mushfiqur, who had flown back to the country for the birth of his second child, was granted an extension of leave. “Mushfiqur has informed us that his wife is still recovering, and he needs to be by her side and with their children at this time,” BCB cricket operations chairman Jalal Yunus was quoted as saying in the media release.

This might open up a chance for Anamul Haque Bijoy, the other wicketkeeper alongside regular Liton Das. Bijoy is yet to feature in a game in this Asia Cup but with the India game now a dead rubber, Bangladesh may look to experiment.