

Pakistan sweat on Naseem’s fitness

AFP, KARACHI

Pakistan fast bowler Naseem Shah is doubtful for next month’s World Cup due to a shoulder injury, with the PCB awaiting medical reports before making a final call on his fitness and participation.

Naseem was ruled out of the Asia Cup after suffering the injury



during a tournament match against India in Colombo last Sunday.

Pakistan’s local media reported initial scans of his right shoulder showed the injury was worse than expected but the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) said Saturday that Naseem was still being monitored.

“The PCB medical team has been monitoring the status of Naseem’s shoulder injury,” the board said.

“Medical consultations with the experts are underway to provide the best possible care to Naseem. The medical panel will decide on fast bowler’s return to cricket based on further assessments.”

The 20-year-old has been part Pakistan’s pace trio along with Shaheen Shah Afridi and Haris Rauf.

Rauf also suffered injury to his flank and had to miss the Sri Lanka game in the Asia Cup.



India, Sri Lanka eye Asian crown

AFP, Colombo

Rohit Sharma’s India face underdogs Sri Lanka in Sunday’s Asia Cup final, a crucial momentum-builder heading into next month’s ODI World Cup.

The cricketing giants have 13 Asian titles between them and Sri Lanka have a history of sneaking into the tournament’s final – to the consternation of fans keen for any showdown between arch-rivals India and Pakistan.

Bangladesh ended India’s unbeaten run in the 50-over tournament after edging them out by six runs in Friday’s last Super Four match.

Shubman Gill hit 121 but his knock went in vain after India faltered in their chase of 266 in Colombo, where Sunday’s final will also be held.

“I don’t think it has broken our momentum,” Gill told reporters after the narrow defeat.

“We have played good cricket. Sometimes it happens on these wickets. I was set and should have finished off the game.”

Gill said clinching India’s eighth Asia Cup title would give them “confidence” ahead of the World Cup starting back home on October 5.

India began with a washed-out match in Palallekele against Pakistan, whose fast bowlers rattled their top order and bowled

Sri Lanka hold a slim lead after 19 ODI Asia Cup matches, having won 10 of them.

The two long-standing rivals have met eight times in Asia Cup finals. India won five, while Sri Lanka won three in a row in 1997, 2004 and 2008.

In 37 games at Colombo’s R. Premadasa Stadium, India won 18 against Sri Lanka’s 16.

Their rivalry stretches back to the 1979 World Cup, when Sri Lanka defeated India by 47 runs in a 60-over match.

Overall, India won 97 of 166 ODIs. In the previous ten matches, the island nation had only won once.

them out for 266 in the only innings possible due to rain.

Big guns Virat Kohli and returning batsman KL Rahul hit back with centuries in their next outing against Babar Azam’s team to rack up 356-2 and crush Pakistan by 228 runs.

India then prevented a gutsy Sri Lankan chase to book their place in the final, but Gill said their opponents were still a threat.

“We will have to pull up our socks and be

at our 100 percent to beat them,” he said.

Sri Lanka, who won the previous edition of the Asia Cup played in the T20 format, came in as underdogs and snuck into the Super Fours with a dramatic win over Afghanistan.

They soon got into their groove on home soil and, despite going down to India, edged out Pakistan in a knockout match for their 11th Asia Cup final.

“We came without our key players, but still we managed to make the finals,” skipper Dasun Shanaka said.

Injuries sidelined Dushmantha Chameera and Wanindu Hasaranga, but others stood up at crucial junctures.

Kusal Mendis and Charith Asalanka both hit match-winning knocks to take the team over the line in a rain-shortened match and push a much-favoured Pakistan out of the tournament.

Up-and-coming fast bowler Matheesha Pathirana and left-arm spinner Dunith Wellalage have impressed and lead the tournament’s bowling chart with 11 and 10 wickets respectively.

Wellalage rattled India’s batting with five wickets including the prized scalps of Kohli and Rohit in their Super Four match.

Twice before in the Asia Cup Sri Lanka have lost to India in the Super Four stage only to beat them in the finals, in 2004 and 2008.

U-19s hope to end SAFF duck

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh under-19 football team will leave for Kathmandu on Tuesday, hoping to lift the only South Asian trophy for the first time.

The SAFF Under-19 Championship, which has been held four times so far – changing age-groups from under-18 to under-20 level – will be held for the fifth time in the Nepalese capital from September 21 to September 30.

Bangladesh have participated in all four editions but failed to win any of those occasions, despite making the final on last three occasions – the only trophy missing from Bangladesh’s cabinet in South Asian football. The boys in red and green will have another opportunity to set the record straight as they leave for the Himalayan kingdom with high hopes. Bangladesh will play their first match against defending champions India on the opening day and play against Bhutan, the other team in Group B, two days later.

Bangladesh coach Rashed Ahmed Pappu, at a press conference at the BFF House yesterday, said all their focus is on the India match.

“The first match against India is obviously a very tough match. All of our focus is on that match. If we can win the match, we will clearly be in the semifinals. Even if we draw that game, we will have an advantage,” the coach opined.

Bangladesh captain Moinul Islam said that this tournament is an opportunity for the side to end their trophy drought.

Group A features hosts Nepal alongside Pakistan and Maldives. The top two teams from each group will play the semifinals and the final will be held on September 30.



Liverpool’s Andrew Robertson celebrates with Mohamed Salah after scoring his side’s second goal during a 3-1 comeback win against Wolves yesterday that put the Reds top of the table.



Tamim, Mahmudullah return for NZ series

SPORTS REPORTER

Opener Tamim Iqbal and all-rounder Mahmudullah Riyad are set to return to international cricket as both veterans were included in the 15-member squad for the first two matches of the three-match ODI series against New Zealand in Mirpur, starting from September 21.

Tamim, the former Bangladesh skipper, recovered from his back injury to make a cut in the team ahead of the World Cup after he withdrew his decision to retire from international cricket in July following an intervention by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

Mahmudullah also got his name in the list after all the

SQUAD

Liton Das (Captain), Tamim Iqbal, Soumya Sarkar, Anamul Haque Bijoy, Tawhid Hridoy, Mahmudullah Riyad, Nurul Hasan Sohan, Mahedi Hasan Miraz, Nasum Ahmed, Mustafizur Rahman, Tanzim Hasan Sakib, Tanzid Hasan Tamim, Zakir Hasan, Rishad Hossain, Khaled Ahmed.

discussion regarding his future.

The right hander was dropped following the ODIs against England at home in March due to poor performance and with his axing from the Asia Cup squad.

Liton Das will lead the team in the first two matches as regular skipper Shakib Al Hasan has been rested along with Mushfiqur Rahim, Mehedi Hasan Miraz, and the pace trio of Taskin Ahmed, Hasan Mahmud, and Shoriful Islam.

Nurul Hasan Sohan and Soumya Sarkar also returned to the side. The uncapped players in the squad are left-hander Zakir Hasan, pacer Khaled Ahmed, and leg-spinner Rishad Hossain.

The national selection panel chairman Minhajul Abedin Nannu said: “The decision to rest players was taken in consideration of the World Cup in India which will be a long tournament where ensuring the mental and physical fitness of the cricketers will be very important. The series against New Zealand provides us an opportunity to take a look at some other players as well ahead of this major event.”

The New Zealand team, which will largely feature a second-string side led by pacer Lockie Ferguson, have already started arriving in Bangladesh in separate contingents from last night.

The Bangladesh team will commence training on September 19 at the SBNCs in Mirpur, where the three matches will be played on September 21, 23 and 26.

Of flickering flames and misleading hype

BISHWAJIT ROY

Prior to the 16th edition of Asia Cup, the continent’s biggest cricket event, there were high hopes surrounding three-time finalists Bangladesh. The Tigers, however, only returned home with a comprehensive victory over Afghanistan and a consolation win over India.

Yet, the latter came as more than a consolation to the team management as it gave Bangladesh skipper Shakib Al Hasan and coach Chandika Hathurusingha enough confidence to present an optimistic picture ahead of the World Cup.

While Shakib warned after India’s triumph that they will be “a dangerous side in the World Cup”, Chandika labelled it as “huge” boost for the Tigers heading into the showpiece event.

Bangladesh began their campaign with a demoralising loss against Sri Lanka, but bounced back strongly against Afghanistan to earn a Super Four spot. The ghost of their opening match’s batting debacle resurfaced in the first two Super Four matches against Pakistan and Sri Lanka, prompting Shakib to remark, “We really needed this reality check before the World Cup”.

It was undoubtedly refreshing as Shakib and co regained their confidence following a nail-biting six-run win against India, who rested important players such as Virat Kohli and pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah in the dead rubber.

A thrilling win against India is always pleasant, and it was great to see skipper Shakib finally leading from the front in the tournament, earning the player-of-the-match award in the process.

The most satisfying scene was the performance of a young pacer, Tanzim Hasan Sakib, in his maiden game. If his first spell suggests a promising future, his composure in the last over will be remembered for a long time.

Nothing was wrong with Hathurusingha heaping praise on

unlikely heroes in Mahedi Hasan and Nasum Ahmed, who stood up to give team management food for thought as they look to finalise World Cup squad by September 28.

Moreover, Shakib commended Towhid Hridoy the other day, and the batter deserved it. Another player worthy of praise is Mehedi Hasan Miraz who strengthened his reputation as a utility cricketer.

As a team, though, the Tigers fell short of their goals for the event. Their



performance did not live up to the claim, made by the head coach, of being “one of the best sides in its history”.

If we recall what Hathurusingha remarked to broadcasters earlier this year, we must conclude that the Tigers were underachievers.

“We have started the road map for the Asia Cup, Bangladesh’s side is among the best in its history. We have the best opportunity to do something that Bangladesh haven’t done before,” said the Bangladesh coach before the third day of play in the one-off Test between Bangladesh and Afghanistan in Mirpur in June.

But Bangladesh’s team resorted

to come up with a defence for their inconsistent show. Shakib stated after the India match, “Lots of injuries, and players coming in and out didn’t help during this Asia Cup.”

Injury setbacks, now a normal occurrence in world cricket, cannot be an excuse for a side who claimed to be one of the best sides in their history. A team cannot prosper in a global event unless it has a greater pool of players, as Sri Lanka does, contending for a spot in the eleven.

While speaking to local media prior to their departure to Sri Lanka, Shakib refused to correlate Asia Cup displays to the World Cup; although he did say that they may take confidence from excellent performances in the continental event.

The all-rounder also stated that they will not be discouraged if they do not perform well in the Asia Cup, adding, “Even if we do well, it does not mean our chances for the World Cup will improve.”

It is worth pointing out that a win against India may restore Bangladesh’s confidence to some extent, but it doesn’t imply that lingering batting problems, particularly in the top and death overs, will be forgotten.

Murray dedicates Davis Cup win to late grandmother

REUTERS, MANCHESTER

A tearful Andy Murray dedicated his Davis Cup win on Friday to his grandmother after missing her funeral to play in the tie against Switzerland.

Murray battled hard to beat Leandro Riedi 6-7(7), 6-4, 6-4 and appeared to be good spirits during his on-court chat with former player Naomi Broady, talking about his reading interests and a fan in Manchester who had shown him a “magic trick”.

“I went to get a coffee the other morning and we were just sitting outside and a guy came up and started telling jokes. He asked if I wanted to see a magic trick and pulled an orange out of his underpants,” Murray said.

“I wasn’t expecting that, it was a first for me. It looked like a decent orange, but I passed. I let him have it.”

Broady then asked Murray if he had a present for a 90-year-old fan named “Grandma Pat” who was watching live tennis for the first time and the Scot joked about giving her his sweaty t-shirts as a gift before he began to choke up.

“Today’s a tough day for me. It’s actually my gran’s funeral today. I’m sorry to my family that I’m not able to be there, but yeah, gran, that one’s for you,” Murray said.

The three-times Grand Slam champion told reporters later that he had talked with his father ahead of the match.

“He said ‘she would want you to play’. He just said ‘make sure you win’ so I did,” Murray said.