

A fixer-upper with no fix in sight

NABID YEASIN

An act of publicly taking the blame and responsibility, an initiation or indication of setting in motion an overhaul, or a statement of how things are to be taken from here on – none of the aforementioned measures or steps were taken by the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) even as over a fortnight passed since Bangladesh closed their disastrous World Cup campaign.

Perhaps it is nothing surprising from a board that usually thrives in doing things unconventionally.

Hence, it is only understandable that, unlike England team director Rob Key, no one from the BCB brass came up and admitted the ‘fault in approach’, changes were not made in the selection panel or the leadership like it was done by the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), and nor any clear indication about on whom the board will be keeping its faith on moving forward – like it was done by the England Cricket Board (ECB) after their 2015 World Cup debacle – were made.

Yesterday was perhaps the busiest day in the country’s cricketing fraternity since the World Cup in India. It was supposed to be a busy one, with it being the day before the Najmul Hossain Shanto-led Tigers open their latest chapter of the World Test Championship cycle through their first Test against New Zealand in Sylhet.

However, the BCB president Nazmul Hassan Papon and former ODI skipper Tamim Iqbal’s separate appearances in front of the media only added to the commotion.

But, what did all that amount to? Zilch, unfortunately.

It was the first time that the BCB president Hassan met with Tamim after he had been dropped from the World Cup squad – an incident that transpired hot on the heels of a lot of hullabaloo.



Following his omission from the squad, Tamim had said that he did not ‘want to be a part of the dirty game’ that goes on in Bangladesh cricket.

Exactly two months after Tamim’s serious allegations, the BCB president yesterday promised to ‘understand’ and ‘get to the bottom of the problem’ before taking a decision which will be ‘after the [national] elections [next year January] when the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) starts’.

Tamim, in his press briefing during which he refused to take questions, only informed of his willingness to wait it out till Hassan unearths the issues and takes some ‘strict decisions’.

While that was the scenario in the capital, Shanto, in his press conference in Sylhet, mentioned his eagerness to take on the responsibility of the side in all three formats for the long term, if the board sees him fit for the role.

From the vantage point of a professional, Shanto’s expression of desire is logical. As things stand, Bangladesh cricket remains in an uncertain state – at the mercy of interims and stopgap fixes aimed at getting by one series or one tour at a time.

Regular skipper Shakib Al Hasan, who had already said even before the World Cup began that he would not be leading the Tigers in ODIs after the showpiece event, is not near the cricketing actions, and he won’t be anytime soon with the all rounder rehabilitating from a finger injury and busy with preparations for the national elections after being granted nomination.

Experienced campaigner Tamim said he would be back through the BPL next year, but as far as his international career is concerned, things are still murky like it has been for a while.

Given the situation, BCB boss Hassan, who has been in charge of the board for over a decade, might just have to get on with his plans of ‘fixing the team’ sooner.



Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto and coach Chandika Hathurusingha ponder over the pitch at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday ahead of the first Test against New Zealand, which starts today. The hosts, bereft of a number of experienced campaigners, will be up against the Kiwis who have come here with a lot of ammunition.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Concerns over home advantage in new cycle

ABDULLAH AL MEHEDI

Bangladesh will embark on their journey in the third ICC World Test Championship (WTC) cycle with the series against New Zealand, slated to begin with the first Test in Sylhet today.

The Tigers have 12 Tests in the 2023-2025 cycle, with three series at home and as many away. Ahead of the latest WTC cycle, the home advantage factor was once again in discussion during stand-in Test skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto’s press conference.

Home advantage has, however, been a double-edged sword in Bangladesh cricket for many years. Whether Bangladesh’s home advantage factor actually work across their whole cricket schedule is a crucial question, given that they often feel like fish out of water in away conditions where good sporting wickets are in place.

More acutely, Bangladesh’s record over the preceding Test Championships portrays an inability to take home advantage as well as their eight home Tests across two cycles yielded just one draw.

“I believe we are a team capable of winning at home, given the kind of bowling attack and batters we have. We need to slowly build the habit,” Shanto said at the pre-match press conference in Sylhet yesterday.

However, Shanto was not keen on focusing on the home advantage factor ahead of the beginning of the cycle when asked about the wicket for the first Test.

“Don’t want to say it’s a home advantage. I believe whenever a side plays at home, they procure some advantage automatically. We will try to take those. In the first session it could be understood how the wicket

is behaving,” he said.

It signifies problems that Bangladesh skipper and team management usually face in Tests at home. If spin options are prioritised, they need to gauge the opponent’s spin option too. The Tigers famously lost to West Indies after Kyle Mayers stormed in a spin-friendly wicket.

When Bangladesh played Afghanistan in their last Test assignment, Mirpur served a pace-friendly wicket and the Bangladesh pacers did their bit. It was a strategy that bore fruit because of Afghanistan batters’ known weakness to red-ball pace attacks and the visitors’ lack of pace threat.



The same cannot be said about the visiting New Zealand, who have five spin options to pick from: Mitchell Santner, Ajaz Patel, Ish Sodhi, Rachin Ravindra and Glenn Phillips. Their spin options may likely extract more purchase out of the wicket in the upcoming Test than Bangladesh’s Mehedi Hasan, Taijul Islam or Nayeem Hasan. In Trent Boult and Tim Southee, they have pace quality as well.

“Our first priority is to win about the visiting New Zealand, who have five spin options to pick from: Mitchell Santner, Ajaz Patel, Ish Sodhi, Rachin Ravindra and Glenn Phillips. Their spin options may likely extract more purchase out of the wicket in the upcoming Test than Bangladesh’s Mehedi Hasan, Taijul Islam or Nayeem Hasan. In Trent Boult and Tim Southee, they have pace quality as well.

The balancing act would have to come from playing eleven selections too, so that both pacers, spinners and the batters can make their presence felt. Some degree of home advantage is “automatic”, which Shanto stated. Overall, the Tigers’ only friend will be the familiarity and not the pace-versus-spin priority which had hampered their previous Test cycles.

SICS wicket the point of interest

SPORTS REPORTER from Sylhet

The venue for the first Test starting today between Bangladesh and New Zealand, the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium (SICS), had hosted only a solitary Test previously, which resulted in a 151-run defeat for the hosts against Zimbabwe in 2018.

Both teams have had a chance to make their mind up about the type of wicket that will be dished out through several training sessions.

Bangladesh skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto kept his assessment of the surface a mystery, while Kiwi captain Tim Southee adopted an optimistic approach.

“Maybe tomorrow you’ll get a clear idea. As players, we tried to steal as many ideas as we could. When the game begins, we will have more precise information,” Shanto told reporters yesterday.

“We took a little look at the wicket. So, there’s not a lot of information and statistics to go back on. We are expecting a pretty good surface,” Southee said.

Reality check for Newcastle as Dortmund seek spark in Milan

AFP, Paris

Edin Terzic’s Borussia Dortmund can seal a spot in the Champions League last 16 by winning at AC Milan on Tuesday, sparking some positivity amid a stuttering domestic campaign.

Already ten points behind league leaders Bayer Leverkusen with just 12 games played, Terzic’s men have however impressed on the European stage this season.

Dortmund sit first in a Champions League group which includes Milan, Paris Saint-Germain and Newcastle, having conceded just two goals in four matches.

Dortmund drew the reverse fixture 0-0 with Milan in October and another draw, or a loss, would most likely mean the German side need to beat Paris at home in December to progress.

Meanwhile, Newcastle must overcome the might of Paris Saint-Germain and a mounting injury list if the Magpies’ first foray into the Champions League for 20 years is not to come to a premature end on Tuesday.

Damaging back-to-back defeats to Dortmund have left Eddie Howe’s men sitting bottom of a devilishly difficult Group F.

Newcastle must avoid defeat in the French capital to have any chance of reaching the last 16.

Qualification looked well within the grasp of Howe’s side when they humbled PSG 4-1 on Tyneside in October.

But things have since unravelled for Newcastle as an injury crisis has taken its toll despite the club being backed by the riches of the Saudi sovereign wealth fund.



Manchester United’s Alejandro Garnacho scored with a magical overhead kick in the third minute to send the visitors on their way to a 3-0 win on Sunday over Everton. The 19-year-old Argentine leapt acrobatically to meet Diogo Dalot’s cross, firing the ball into the opposite corner past stranded goalkeeper Jordan Pickford before celebrating with a Cristiano Ronaldo-style pirouette at Goodison Park.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Stunning fightback keeps Kings on top

SPORTS REPORTER

Bashundhara Kings took a massive stride towards qualifying for the knockout stage of the AFC Cup with a brilliant come-from-behind 2-1 win over visiting Maziya S&RC in their penultimate Group D fixture at Bashundhara Kings Arena yesterday.

Kings’ Uzbekistani defender Boburbek Yuldashov’s header in the 80th minute cancelled out Maziya’s Regan Obeng’s 10-minute goal.

Brazilian midfielder Miguel Ferreira then struck a stunning winner with a brilliant chip that evaded goalkeeper’s outstretched hands and nestled into the top left corner of the goalpost in the 88th minute.

The charges of Oscar Bruzon now just need a win over hosts Odisha FC on December 11 to qualify for the zonal semifinals for the first time in their history and become the second Bangladeshi club to do so after Abahani in 2019.

The win helped the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) champions maintain their lead in the four-team group with 10 points from five games while Maziya sit bottom of the table with three points from the same number of games.

With the win, the Kings also maintained their unbeaten run at the Kings arena in both international and domestic competitions.

The Kings were without their Brazilian captain Robson Da Silva, who was out injured, and looked short of confidence in the final third.

The hosts got a couple of chances to score



within the first seven minutes but Nigerian Mfun Sunday Udoh and Brazilian Dorielton Gomes squandered them.

Maziya then took the lead against the run of play in the 10th minute, courtesy of a fumble from goalkeeper Mehdi Hasan Srabon.

The rookie goalkeeper mistakenly passed the ball to Maziya’s Vojislav Balabanovic inside the box, whose shot got blocked by defender Boburbek Yuldashov. But the ricochet took the ball straight to Maziya’s Ghanaian midfielder Regan Obeng, who easily fired the ball home.

The Kings looked rattled after conceding the lead and Maziya kept creating chances before the break.

But for the fourth straight match in the AFC

Cup, the Kings bounced back after conceding a goal in the first half.

Udoh came close on a few occasions to level the score while Bishwanath Ghosh rescued Kings from being killed off the match with a timely tackle on Hamza Mohamed in the 48th minute.

With just 10 minutes of regular time to go, Sheikh Morsalin, who came in as a substitute in the 68th minute, whipped the ball inside the box from a corner kick which Yuldashov headed home.

Miguel, who had scored against Mohun Bagan and Odisha FC, hit the winning goal with a chip from 30 yards out, as thousands of home fans in the stands erupted into celebration.