

## Contradiction even in assessment!

ASHEFAQ-UL-ALAM

Bangladesh team's assistant coach Nic Pothas yesterday said the Test team's batting unit is going through a rebuilding stage and everyone needs to remain patient, a statement that contradicts what other important figures of the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) had said in the days prior.

"We have a very young and inexperienced group. There was a very elite group before this. Now we have to build. The only thing that we request is that people are patient," Pothas said at the pre-match press conference ahead of the second Test in Chattogram between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka starting today.

"These are very good young players, but they are young and they're playing against an experienced team and it will take time to learn lessons," he added.

Pothas also likened the young batters in the Test team to school going children, indicating that they are still learning how to play cricket at the Test level.

"We wouldn't expect any different from our children when we put them into new environments. We don't expect our kids to suddenly be experts. That's why they go to school. So, they [the batters] are a fantastic group, and let's judge them in two years' time rather than now."

However, Pothas' plea for patience contradicted a recent statement made by national team selector Abdur Razzak, who blasted the batting performance of the Tigers after they were reduced to 47 for 5 at stumps on Day 3 of the Sylhet Test, chasing 511.

"There is no point in saying that this player is young or that player still hasn't settled in the team. They were picked because they have the ability to handle such situations," Razzak said.



The Bangladesh camp in their final practice session yesterday in Chattogram looked calm, relaxed, and upbeat ahead of their second and final Test against Sri Lanka today at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium. And the main reason behind this uplift in mood, especially after suffering a 328-run thumping in the first Test in Sylhet, was the inclusion of star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan in the group. Assistant coach Nic Pothas, who will be in charge in absence of head coach Chandika Hathurusingha this match, and skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto will definitely relish having the top all-rounder back for the crucial contest.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

👉 Bangladesh have only two wins to their name in 23 Tests at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium (ZACS) in Chattogram. The Tigers have lost 19 and drawn seven. The two wins came against Zimbabwe in 2014 and West Indies in 2018 respectively.

👉 Shakib Al Hasan holds the record for most wickets taken in Tests at ZACS, with 64 in 19 Tests. The star all-rounder is 22 runs away from completing 1,000 runs at the venue.

👉 Mominul Haque averages 63.42 at ZACS as he has amassed 1205 runs in 22 innings. The left-hander has seven centuries and a fifty to his name at the venue and is 25 runs away from 4,000 Test runs.

👉 Sri Lanka pacer Asitha Fernando picked up a 10-wicket haul in his last Test outing against the Tigers. His effort helped the Lankans to a 10-wicket win in Mirpur in May 2022.

## Shakib key as Tigers look to bounce back

SPORTS REPORTER

The first Test between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka in Sylhet was played on a rather pace-friendly wicket, but as the two-match series moves to Chattogram, conditions are expected to be a lot different.

Chattogram usually produces runs, and for Bangladesh, spin has been the weapon of choice at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium. However, for the struggling Bangladesh top order along with the bowlers, it would be about adjusting to changes Chattogram has on the offing.

The condition in the port city is overcast with rain clouds hovering above, but that may not be enough for the Tigers' pace unit to smile about as the temperature and humidity remain challenging.

"Whatever the conditions are, we have to adapt to be flexible to them," Bangladesh assistant coach Nic Pothas, who will be the interim head coach in Chandika Hathurusingha's absence, said in the press conference yesterday.

In the Sylhet Test, especially in the second innings, the Tigers needed to wait for the second new ball to make breakthroughs and even then, spinners did the talking.

With Shakib Al Hasan back, the spin department, also including Mehedi Hasan and Taijul Islam, will be further bolstered. It could also see Bangladesh go with two pacers,

and three spinners — a change from the three-pacer and two-spinner combination in Sylhet.

Shakib, who had not bowled a lot of overs against Ireland in the last Test he played over a year ago, will, however, not feel any less confident with the ball in hand as the star all-rounder has been up to speed, thanks to a few outings in the ongoing Dhaka Premier League.

**If they come hard, we will go hard. If they keep calm, we will keep calm.**

Sri Lanka captain Dhananjaya de Silva ahead of the Chattogram Test.

Shakib is also the highest wicket-taker in Tests at the ground, scalping 64 wickets in 19 matches. Given the spinners' experience, the Tigers' think tank may feel there is an edge to be exploited given Lankan spinners' relative inexperience. However, how Tigers' batters fare would be a bigger concern.

In Mushfiqur Rahim's absence, Shakib will also offer the touch of experience the Tigers definitely craved in their 328-run drubbing in the Sylhet Test.

The bulk of the runs for Sri Lanka in the Sylhet Test were made by their middle and lower-middle order — mostly by skipper

Dhananjaya de Silva and Kamindu Menis, both of whom struck centuries in each of the innings. Given the form of the Lankans' middle order, it remains to be seen how much the Tigers spinners can hold sway if the presumption about the Chattogram surface being conducive to spin holds true.

Sparks may also fly. Sri Lanka's Angelo Matthews has not yet attended a press conference in this tour but in Shakib's presence, the 'timed-out' incident from World Cup 2023 which resurfaced in the form of its enactment in the preceding ODI and T20I series, could find new grounds.

"The important thing for us as a management group is to manage the mood of the group and as long as we are level, then we will learn. But we certainly aren't an emotional group and it's not an emotional change room," Pothas said.

Lankan skipper Dhananjaya de Silva expected a batting friendly wicket. When asked about what kind of intent his side were expecting from Bangladesh, he said: "If they come hard, we will go hard. If they keep calm, we will keep calm."

Regarding Shakib, he said: "Why should I talk about him? He's not in my team."

But from Bangladesh's perspective, Shakib will perhaps be the key to adapt and transform.



Not just Razzak, BCB president Nazmul Hassan Papon also expressed his disappointment with the batting display recently.

"They are not children who have been suddenly sent to the ground. They don't have to be told everything. All of them know it," Papon told the media on Tuesday.

This contradiction is a bad sign for the team overall as this indicates that there is a difference in point of view among important figures of the board about the reason behind Bangladesh's embarrassing 328-run defeat to Sri Lanka in the first Test.

Pothas' statement indicates that the Tigers folding for 188 and 182 in the two innings of the Sylhet Test was due to the inexperience in the batting unit while the selector and the BCB president in their statements refused to accept it as an excuse.

Moreover, calling Bangladesh's batting unit in the Sylhet Test 'young and inexperienced' doesn't ring true entirely considering four out of the top seven batters had more than 50 Test innings under their belt.

The inexperienced trio in the batting unit were Mahmudul Hasan Joy, Zakir Hasan, and Shahadat Hossain Dipu.

Out of them, Joy and Zakir are Bangladesh's preferred opening pair in Tests right now with Tamim Iqbal not in the picture.

Meanwhile, in the same Test, Sri Lanka's most inexperienced batter was Kamindu Mendis, having played just one Test prior. But his inexperience didn't stop him from scoring a century in both innings as the young batter showed the aptitude needed to make runs in Tests. Perhaps, it would be better for the hosts to focus less on inexperience and more on the glaring lack in Test mindset.

## Mohammedan thrash Fortis

SPORTS REPORTER

Title aspirants Mohammedan Sporting Club resumed their Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) campaign with a bang, handing a massive 4-0 defeat to Fortis Football Club in their first match of the second leg at the Rafique Uddin Bhuiyan Stadium in Mymensingh yesterday.

The fifth win from 10 matches meant Mohammedan closed the gap with leaders Bashundhara Kings, trailing the four-time champions by two points, who are set to play their 100th BPL match against Brothers Union today.

Coincidentally, Brothers Union were also Abahani Limited's opponent in their 100th match in the league in the 5th BPL, which Abahani won 4-2.

Fortis FC had given Mohammedan a run for their money in their first meeting this season before losing 2-1 but were unable to repeat their first-leg performance.

Though Mohammedan dominated from the outset, they had to wait till the 41st minute before taking the lead and once they broke the deadlock, the Black and Whites struck three more goals within a span of 18 minutes.

Uzbek midfielder Mozaffarjon Mozaffarov received a cut-back from captain Souleymane Diabate and let loose a powerful drive from outside the box to open the scoring.

Diabate then doubled the lead from the spot in the stoppage time of the first half after Emon Shahirar was harshly tackled

inside the box.

After resumption, Jafar Iqbal made it 3-0 in the 53rd minute with a simple tap in before Emon scored the last goal of the match, controlling a forward pass from Diabate inside the box and then easily beating the opponent goalkeeper in the



59th minute.

At the Sheikh Fazlul Haque Moni Stadium in Gopalganj, Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club came from behind to play out a 1-1 draw against Sheikh Russel Krira Chakra. Sheikh Russel's Guinean recruit Sekou Sylla scored in the 23rd minute before Sheikh Jamal's Shokhrukhbek Kholmatov cancelled it out from the spot in the 56th.

Bangladesh Police also made a winning start in the second leg with a 1-0 win over Chittagong Abahani with Al Amin nodding the winning header in the 79th minute at Birshreshtha Shaheed Flight Lt Matiur Rahman Stadium in Munshiganj.

## Not a battle for top spot after a while

REUTERS, Berlin

Saturday's "Der Klassiker" between Bayern Munich and Borussia Dortmund will unusually not be about controlling the title race or taking over the top spot in the German Bundesliga.

The two teams between them have won the last 14 league titles, but when the Bavarians host Dortmund at the Allianz Arena, each will be trying to save their domestic season.

Bayern are currently in second place on 60 points, a massive 10 behind Bayer Leverkusen, but have not yet given up on a record-extending 12th successive league crown.

However, no Bundesliga club has ever made up such a deficit at this stage of the season, and coach Thomas Tuchel's squad is also struggling with injuries.

Top striker Harry Kane was back in training on Wednesday after recovering from an ankle injury in a league game two weeks ago that ruled him out of two England friendlies. He participated in their final training session on Thursday as well.

Keeper Manuel Neuer, however, is unlikely to be fit in time after picking up an adductor muscle injury while training with the Germany squad.

Dortmund for their part are at risk of missing out on the top-four finish that would give automatic qualification for next season's UEFA Champions League.



### SHORT CORNER

#### Alonso to stay on as Leverkusen boss

Bayer Leverkusen boss Xabi Alonso ended speculation of a potential move to one of his former clubs Liverpool or Bayern



Munich in the close season when the Spaniard said yesterday that he was committed to staying with the Bundesliga leaders. Alonso, who has a contract with Leverkusen until 2026, has become the talk of Europe and a reported target for Bayern Munich and Liverpool.

#### KKR bring 16-year-old Ghazanfar to replace Mujeeb

Kolkata Knight Riders have drafted in 16-year-old Afghanistan spinner Allah Ghazanfar as a replacement of his compatriot and injured Mujeeb Ur Rahman for the ongoing season of the Indian Premier League (IPL), confirmed the franchise on Thursday. Ghazanfar, who joined KKR for a base price of INR 20 lakh, had shown his potential at the 2024 U-19 Cricket World Cup, held earlier this year in South Africa.

#### Barca starlets Yamal, Cubarsi 'can define era of football': Xavi

Barcelona coach Xavi Hernandez said Friday teenage stars Lamine Yamal and Pau Cubarsi could go on to 'define an era' of world football. Both have become key pillars in a revived Barcelona side back in the Champions League quarter-finals for the first time in four years and still holding some faint hopes of defending their La Liga title.

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