

## Pakistan target 'ruthless' bowling

AGENCIES

Head coach Jason Gillespie has emphasised the need for Pakistan to "play positive" and be "ruthless" in their bowling against Bangladesh as they aim to win the second and final Test in Rawalpindi, starting today, and square the series.

"We want to go out there and play positive cricket... and with our bowling, we want to be ruthless..." said Gillespie, the former Australia pacer, acknowledging the challenge ahead after the hosts conceded a stunning 10-wicket defeat in the series opener at the same venue.

Bangladesh spinners Mehedi Hasan Miraz (4-21) and Shakib Al Hasan (3-44) wreaked havoc in the second innings, leaving Pakistan to regret their decision of not including a frontline spinner in the first Test.

Pakistan have thus recalled leg-spinner Abrar Ahmed, who has 38 wickets in six Tests to his credit, coming in for star pacer Shaheen Shah Afridi -- rested to spend time with his newborn son and family.

"We're just looking at what our best combination is for this game," said Gillespie, who is overseeing his first series with Pakistan.



All-rounder Shakib Al Hasan leads the charge as Bangladesh players had an upbeat training session on Wednesday at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium where they will face hosts Pakistan in the second of the two-Test series, starting today, hoping to seal a first-ever series victory over Pakistan. [Bottom] The hosts, meanwhile, will be eager to carry their determination from the practice session into the game and bounce back following a 10-wicket thrashing in the first game.

PHOTO: AFP

## Two U-20 players get first national team call-ups

SPORTS REPORTER

Two players from the SAFF U-20 Championship winning team -- defender Shakil Ahad Topu and forward Mirajul Islam -- got maiden call-ups to the national team for the upcoming two FIFA friendlies against Bhutan next month.

A total of four players from the SAFF U-20 team were included in the 23-member squad announced by head coach Javier Cabrera yesterday. SAFF U-20 midfielder Chandon Roy and forward Rabbi Hossain Rahul, who had previously earned national team call-ups, also made the squad this time.

Six players -- Tariq Kazi, Rimon Hossain, Rafiq Islam, Syed Kirmani, Sushanto Tripura, and Mehedi Hasan Srabon -- from the squad that faced Australia in the World Cup Qualifiers in June were left out.

Bangladesh will leave for Bhutan today with the matches scheduled for September 5 and 8, respectively.

**Bangladesh squad:** Mitul Marma, Sujon Hossain, Pappu Hossain, Topu Barman, Bishwanath Ghosh, Saad Uddin, Mehdi Hasan, Rahmat Mia, Isa Faisal, Shakil Hossain, Shakil Ahad Topu, Sohel Rana, Md Ridoy, Jamal Bhuiyan, Md Sohel Rana, Mirajul, Chandon, Mojibur Rahman Jony, Rakib Hossain, Shiekh Morsalin, Faisal Ahmed Fahim, Shahriar Emon and Rahul.

# Keeping complacency at bay biggest challenge for Tigers

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh seemingly caught Pakistan off guard last week in the first Test with their brilliant all-round showing to register their maiden Test win over the Asian giants and now stand with a chance to clinch their first-ever Test series win against the hosts.

When the Tigers step into the field today in Rawalpindi for the series deciding second Test, they will undoubtedly come across a wounded Pakistan team which will be out to prove a point.

But before worrying about the opposition, the team will have to fight the feeling of complacency that could creep into their psyche after the history-making win in the opening Test and rob them off the chance to make further history, something that has happened in Test series against Australia and New Zealand.

Bangladesh don't possess a healthy record in the longest-format despite being in the scene since 2000. They have won only eight Test series and drawn 10 out of the 73 they have competed in before the ongoing series against Pakistan.

Bangladesh have won the first match of a series involving two or more Tests only seven times and although they managed to win four of those, two each against Zimbabwe and the West Indies, they have finish at the losing end in the other three occasions, once against Australia and twice against New Zealand.

In 2017, Bangladesh created history when they beat Australia for the first time in a Test by 20 runs in a thrilling contest in a tailor-made wicket at the Sher-e-Bangla

National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur but they ended the series on a losing note in Chattogram, conceding a seven-wicket defeat.

Against New Zealand, Bangladesh went 1-0 up in Mount Maunganui in 2022 and in Sylhet in 2023, but lost the following Tests in Christchurch and Mirpur respectively.

After squandering three golden opportunities to seal a Test series win against a top side, Bangladesh once again find themselves in a position of

strategy, of course." Bangladesh head coach Chandika Hathurusingha told reporters during a press conference yesterday.

"We focus on our strengths and limitations. Then on top of that, you look at the pitch and the overcast condition as well. So, we take all these into account when we think about strategy," he added.

In the opening Test, Bangladesh posted 565 in the first innings after the hosts declared on 448-6. Openers Shadman Islam and Zakir Hassan showed the way



strength heading into the final Test, with a chance to make history.

To do so, the Tigers have to guard themselves from complacency, handle the pressure of expectations while remaining on the offense.

"We always go with an offensive

with a cautious but effective partnership that allowed the tourists to go into the third day with all 10 wickets intact.

Similarly, when the team needed the bowlers to raise their hands, they did it quite brilliantly, more so during the final day of the game when they bowled out

**Since gaining Test status in 2000, Bangladesh have only won two of their 32 overseas series with wins in the West Indies (2009) and Zimbabwe (2021), drawing three and losing 27.**

Pakistan inside 56 overs in the second innings to set up a 30-run target, which the openers chased down without a hitch, securing the team's biggest ever win in Tests in terms of wickets in hand.

"I think the important thing is you have a partnership early on like the 12 overs our openers batted [on Day 2]. It gave us a lot of confidence and control of the game on the third day morning. Then Mominul [Haque] and Shadman [Islam] put up 90 odd and then Mushfiqur [Rahim], Liton [Das] and [Mehedi Hasan] Miraz capitalised on that platform," Hathurusingha recounted the first Test win.

"We talked about spending time in the middle and getting their fast bowlers to come and bowl in the second, third spells. So, I think that mindset changed and the approach was different, our game plan was slightly different because of the condition. I think that helped a lot to put up a good show with the bat," Hathurusingha concluded.

## BCB to appoint new audit firm

SPORTS REPORTER

An independent audit firm will be appointed from amongst top four audit firms to look into Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB)'s finances, board president Faruque Ahmed informed following yesterday's board meeting.

Moreover, the tender process for the Sheikh Hasina International Stadium, which was to be built in Purbachal, has been cancelled.

"The stadium's tender process's last date was yesterday [Wednesday] and we have cancelled it following everyone's approval," Faruque told reporters.

The board meeting was supposed to shed light on the new standing committees under Faruque, but the standing committees have not yet been decided. Faruque revealed that chairman of women's wing Shafiqul Islam Nadel has tendered his resignation.

The newly appointed BCB president said that he was hopeful of holding the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) at the right time. However, he will first be focusing on organising the teams that will participate.

Faruque further informed that he will be looking at the 2023 World Cup investigation report, which had not been made public under previous BCB president Nazmul Hassan Papon.

Meanwhile, ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan and head coach Chandika Hathurusingha have been in the spotlight for separate reasons. Faruque said that a decision on Hathurusingha will have to wait until the Pakistan series ends.

Questions had been raised over whether Shakib will be allowed to travel and stay outside the country and yet continue to play. Faruque confirmed that Shakib will continue staying outside since he has been handed NOC to play in county cricket, but a decision on the matter will be made after the India series.

# 'The players have incredible love for the country'

Maruful Haque is undoubtedly one of the country's top coaches, with his domestic achievements underscoring his credentials. The 54-year-old added another accolade by guiding Bangladesh's youth football team to their maiden SAFF U-20 Championship title. Upon returning to Dhaka from Nepal, Maruful spoke to **The Daily Star's Anisur Rahman** about his journey to winning the championship. The excerpts of the interview are as follows:

**The Daily Star (DS):** How challenging was it to prepare for the tournament in just 15 days, also considering the players were out of action for two months?

**Maruful Haque (MH):** This was one of the toughest challenges of my career. I had to conduct two training cycles while also ensuring the players got enough rest. In 12 to 13 sessions, moderate fitness was prioritised alongside the application of emergency fitness components, mainly aerobic training. Tactically, I didn't focus on all aspects -- knowing the individual quality of the players, strength and playing style of other teams in the SAFF region -- but chose five effective tactics and applied them across the four matches. However, the players had maintained a level of basic fitness, which helped prepare them.

**DS:** How did you motivate them for the final against hosts and two-time champions Nepal, who had never lost to Bangladesh in previous four encounters?

**MH:** From the second day of training, I injected self-belief in the players that they could become champions. When a coach understands the pattern of the players' mentality, then he can easily guide the whole squad. I noticed an incredible love for the country, which I hadn't seen in other teams before. I tapped into this by showing them motivational images, relating to the [July-August's historic] student movement and the trophy unveiling.

**DS:** How do you see this squad, including forwards Mirajul Islam and Rabbi Hossain Rahul, progressing to the senior team?

**MH:** It's too early to predict, but I

believe most of this group have the potential to make it to the senior team. Ultimately, it depends on how each player develops, as 80 percent of players in our country fail due to their own actions, and the rest due to external factors like injuries, family issues, or clubs.

**DS:** You previously guided the senior national team through a month-long of training, and worked with U-23 team likewise, but didn't succeed. From your end, what made things click this time?

**MH:** The senior level was highly competitive, with the country's top players. Back then, we were behind teams like India, Afghanistan, and Maldives -- who had players like Ali Ashfaq. In South Asia's age-group tournaments, all teams are fairly equal, though India are slightly ahead. However, I've also developed myself, gained more experience, and updated my approach to fit the situation.



PHOTO: FIZOZ AHMED

Bangladesh players celebrate with the SAFF U-20 Championship trophy upon arriving at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka yesterday, returning home to a heroes' welcome following their maiden triumph in the regional youth competition by beating hosts Nepal 4-1 in the final in Lalitpur on Wednesday.