

# ‘Dedication’ key in Jaker’s Test selection

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

Coaches and selectors believed that Jaker Ali’s call up for the India Tests was very well-deserved, saying his dedication and adaptability in crisis situation could be an asset for the team in the tough tour.

Jaker, a middle-order wicketkeeper-batsman, earned his maiden call up to the Bangladesh Test squad for the upcoming two-match Test series against India yesterday, as the selectors opted to go with an extra batting option to replace the injured Shoriful Islam, who is still recovering from a groin injury.

“Looking at the team combination, we felt that we should increase an option in the middle-order with the condition and opponent in mind. So, we went for an extra batter,” national selector Hannan Sarkar said in a press meet yesterday.

Jaker, who made his Bangladesh debut during last year’s Asian Games in Hangzhou, first caught everyone’s attention in the shortest format with his brilliant showing in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) 2024, smashing 199 runs in 10 innings at a strike rate of 141.13.

His performance earned him a place for the home T20I series against Sri Lanka where he smashed 68 off 34 balls in the first match and nearly

pulled off a thrilling win for the Tigers, chasing 207.

Jaker has failed to do justice to his promise in the 14 T20Is innings since then and also had an average season in the first-class competition the National Cricket League 2023-24, making 266 runs in seven innings, averaging 38.

But the 26-year-old showed that he

the ninth batter, proving himself a deserving candidate for the Test side.

“Jaker has been working under me since his Under-19 days. He has the potential and deserves this call up. His performance against Pakistan A team was really brilliant,” Mizanur Rahman Babul, Bangladesh ‘A’ head coach in the Pakistan tour, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Local coach Sohel Islam spoke about Jaker’s dedication, saying, “His biggest quality is his dedication. In every situation and format, he wants to stay at the wicket, wants to play big innings and contribute for the team, he has that hunger.”

Babul also spoke about how teams like England and India now try to score at higher rate in Tests and Jaker, who has the ability to take the attack to the opposition, could be a decent backup option to have at the middle or lower-middle order.

“His strike rate was excellent in the 172-run knock. Many international cricketers play at a high similar strike rate in Tests now... Everyone here likes him because he plays timely innings. In crisis situations, he is an excellent player to have.”

can make an impact in red-ball cricket away from home in Bangladesh ‘A’ team’s tour of Pakistan last month, hitting a 172 off 286 balls at a strike rate 60.13 against Pakistan Shaheens in the second of the two four-day games.

In that match, he came to bat after four early wickets and departed as

## BANGLADESH SQUAD

Najmul Hossain Shanto (captain), Mahmudul Hasan Joy, Zakir Hasan, Shadman Islam, Mominul Haque, Mushfiqur Rahim, Shakib Al Hasan, Liton Das, Mehedi Hasan Miraz, Taijul Islam, Nayeem Hasan, Nahid Rana, Jaker Ali Anik, Hasan Mahmud, Taskin Ahmed and Khaled Ahmed.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Season delay in view amid 6-week prep demand

SPORTS REPORTER



The country’s 2024-25 football season was originally scheduled to get underway today with the lone match of the newly introduced Challenge Cup, but the recent changes in the country’s political scene deferred the season’s opening by three weeks, with a tentative start date of October 4.

However, the majority of clubs have requested at least six weeks for preparation before the season begins. If the demand is met, the season will commence after the upcoming Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) elections, scheduled to take place on October 26.

Of the 10 participating teams in the Bangladesh Premier League, defending champions Bashundhara Kings have already kickstarted their preparations, considering their October-November AFC Challenge League campaign. Bangladesh Police FC are also engaged in pre-season training, but the remaining eight clubs are eagerly awaiting the outcome of tomorrow’s meeting between the BFF Professional League Management Committee and the representatives of the participating clubs before beginning their pre-season activity.

“We are waiting for Saturday’s meeting before making our decision to begin pre-season preparations, as we have already requested six weeks for preparation,” said Abahani manager Nazrul Islam, adding that they were originally supposed to start their pre-season on August 9 but could not proceed following political changeover on August 5.

Mohammedan SC coach Alfaz Ahmed said, “I believe a team need at least six to seven weeks for pre-season preparation. I also think BFF needs one to two months to prepare new grounds, as the clubs want to play at venues near Dhaka.”

Fortis FC manager Rashedul Islam also stressed

**The federation should understand the current state of the clubs, who also need time to restructure everything following the changeover.**

Brother Union manager and BFF executive member AMER KHAN

on the importance of a six-week preparation period, informing that their pre-season training was also supposed to begin in early August. “We are now waiting for Saturday’s meeting,” he said.

Rahmatganj MFS general secretary Imtiaz Hamid Sabuj wants the issue of bringing foreign players to be settled as well. “I think we may face issues bringing in foreign players because we’re unsure whether they will receive on-arrival visas after the government change. So, we need time to settle that matter as well as to prepare the team.”

“If the league committee allows the clubs six weeks of preparation from now, then the season is likely to start after BFF elections, and there could be uncertainty over the start of the season. Let’s see what decisions are made at the meeting on Saturday,” added Sabuj, also a BFF executive member.

Brothers Union manager Amer Khan, however, expressed that they do not want any decisions imposed on the clubs without their input.

“We believe the league committee must discuss the matter with the participating clubs, who are going through a very different situation than usual. The federation should understand the current state of the clubs, who also need time to restructure everything following the changeover.

“We need to know why the one-match Challenge Cup has been introduced and why the Independence Cup was excluded. We don’t even know the timeframe for the season or the league venues,” said Amer, also a BFF executive member.

## Batter Shakib at crossroads?

SPORTS REPORTER

“Actually, Shakib’s [Al Hasan] batting, he is not in rhythm,” Bangladesh selector Hannan Sarkar said at the press conference in Mirpur after announcing a 16-member squad for the upcoming India Tests this month.

Shakib’s batting struggles have been in the limelight and questions are being raised whether the 37-year-old is past his best days as a batter or just a knock away from getting back to form.

Test cricket provides time, but one must face far steeper challenges in the longest format. The Bangladesh team management will be hoping that such challenges will set star all-rounder Shakib on the right course to overcome his batting blues.

His bat did not smile in the Pakistan series, nor in the preceding Global

T20 league in Canada. Shakib is yet to play in any ODIs since the last ODI World Cup in India, when his eye problems first surfaced. In Tests though, his last fifty came against Ireland last year.

His eye problem still persists, Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) sources have revealed. In fact, the change of stance that has been seen lately, starting from the Asia Cup in Pakistan and Sri Lanka last year, is largely due to his right eye’s blurry vision.

“He has been prescribed rest; he needs a big gap,” a BCB source claimed.

But at the twilight of his career, Shakib cannot afford a gap that would allow him to rest without playing for a long period.

He has just played for Surrey in County Championship Division One, where he had the ball do the talking – picking nine wickets in two innings, featuring a five-for. However, he has not yet addressed concerns over his batting.

“He won’t be able to get that kind of rest now, so he will have to manage it,” sources close to the development informed The Daily Star.

If there is a cricketer from Bangladesh who can go against the grain and current form, simply to meet a challenge, that’s Shakib. While

batting has been difficult in Pakistan, the manner of his dismissals were not dissimilar to those of other Bangladesh batters. He struggled against the movement of Pakistan pacers on day three of the second Rawalpindi Test, but so did the other batters. His last innings in Pakistan showed he can still dig deep.

As far as Hannan’s assessment is concerned, it is only a matter of time for Shakib to get over his batting woes.

“I believe, given the standards he has set, it’s just a matter of time – just one innings away. It’s always a concern for the opposition when Shakib is at the wicket. No one rates Shakib based on two to five innings, and neither do we,” he said.

Shakib is probably the only player in the Tigers’ rank who would still be considered a key player despite his struggles in one aspect of the game as the all-round ability of the cricketer remains unmatched with anyone else.

Similarly, it is also obvious that he would be questioned for underperforming in any one department.

For Shakib, this, however, is nothing new. But will this time the star all-rounder be able to come out with answers, especially with the willow?

## Arteta agrees new Arsenal deal

REUTERS

Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta has signed a contract extension, the Premier League club said on Thursday.

The Spaniard’s existing deal was set to expire at the end of the season and, while the club did not disclose any details, British media said his new contract runs to 2027.

“I feel extremely proud, very excited and am looking forward to what is coming next,” Arteta said in a statement.

“I feel very inspired, I feel challenged, I feel supported and I want to do much more than we’ve already done together.”

Former Arsenal midfielder Arteta took over in December 2019 after a three-year stint at Manchester City as an assistant coach to Pep Guardiola.

Arteta led Arsenal back into Champions League in 2023, after five years outside the Premier League top four. They finished second to City in last two seasons.



Real Madrid forward Kylian Mbappe gears up on Wednesday as players across Europe return to their respective clubs following the international break. Mbappe had an underwhelming international break, remaining goalless in France’s 3-1 defeat to Italy before coming off the bench in their 2-0 win against Belgium in the Nations League. Carlo Ancelotti will hope for his star man to return to scoring when Real Madrid play Real Sociedad away from home in their LaLiga game on Saturday.

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