

## Markram ready for 'exciting spin challenge'

SPORTS REPORTER

South Africa skipper Aiden Markram embraced the trial by spin the Proteas might face in the first Test of the two-match series against Bangladesh at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium, starting today.

Markram, who is deputizing as skipper for the injured Temba Bavuma, said the spin challenge would be exciting in the Tigers' den where no member from the current squad, except for Bavuma, has ever played a Test before.

"It's a new condition to experience and again it's an exciting opportunity to put many sessions of good cricket together and if we do that, it will lead towards a positive result. But we have no doubt it's going to be tough and different for us as a team," Markram told reporters during the pre-match press conference in Mirpur yesterday.

"Spin obviously is a big talking point, especially when you are from South Africa. We don't get conditions like this on home soil. It's an exciting challenge for us to face a team that's relatively young and doesn't play too



Former Pakistan leggie Mushtaq Ahmed, who re-joined as Bangladesh's spin-bowling coach for the South Africa series, was seen speaking with spinners Nayeem Hasan and Mehedi Hasan Miraz separately yesterday during training in Mirpur on the eve of the Tigers' first Test against the Proteas. Given the slow nature of the Mirpur surface, spin might once again just be the turning point in this crucial World Test Championship fixture. [Bottom] Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto and South Africa's stand-in captain Aiden Markram yesterday pose with the trophy of the two-match series.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED/BCB



many Test matches.

"It's just an exciting thing as a player to be exposed to new conditions, learn, and take the lessons with us to the next Test and also to future sub-continent tours.

"We are here for this [to win Test matches] for sure. We like to play some good cricket. We feel like a Test unit that has the skills and better options now to face spin bowling.

Markram also revealed that his troops have been taking inputs from their experienced left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj, who earlier this year featured in the Bangladesh Premier League.

"Kessy [Keshav Maharaj] is extremely experienced and a clever cricketer. The guys have been tapping him for a lot of information, knowledge and some advice about whatever it might be," Markram said.

The subcontinent has not been a happy hunting ground in Tests for South Africa. It has been more than 10 years since the Proteas won a Test in the sub-continent after their win over Sri Lanka in Galle in the opening Test of the two-match series in July 2014. Since then, they've failed to win in 14 Tests played in four different countries - Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, India and Pakistan - losing 10 matches and drawing the remaining four.

## Tigers face 'difficult' mental state as Mirpur Test arrives

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh go into the first Test at Mirpur against South Africa today with some difficulty carried over from the dramatic events over the past few days, especially in relation to all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan's inability to play the game due to security concerns.

Shakib had been slated to travel to the country but had to cancel his trip owing to security concerns. Head coach Chandika Hathurusingha too was replaced by former West Indies star Phil Simmons just days before the series.

The absence of the all-rounder has left the team in a slightly tricky position since their earlier plans had involved Shakib.

Mirpur is known for producing spinning wickets while the bounce itself keeps low. Shakib is a skilled exponent on these sorts of wickets and holds a key position in the batting line-up. With him not available, the team combination for the first Test is still being pondered.

Even without being here, Shakib has dominated the discussions leading up to the first of the two Tests. Skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto was asked first up in the pre-match press conference whether the mental state of the team is as it should be a day before the game with everything that has been happening off the field.

"Difficult [mental state], to be very honest. But it's not in our control. So thinking too much about it is wasting time. So as much as possible we have to focus on the match since these are



two important Test matches," Shanto said.

The skipper also said that it was unfortunate that Shakib could not fulfil his wish of retiring from the format after playing this Test and accepted that they are scratching their heads to figure out what the playing XI should be without Shakib.

"Yes, still facing problems in getting the combination right, not going to deny that. It will take us some time to fix this.

The players who are here are all capable, everyone will play their roles," Shanto said.

Meanwhile, selector Abdur Razzak was seen taking a good look at the wicket during yesterday's practice session and discussing with spinners Mehedi Hasan Miraz and Nayeem Islam. These two along with Taijul Islam, who is expected to spearhead the attack in Shakib's absence, will most likely hold the key in the match for the hosts.

Shanto said he expected a traditional Mirpur track and hoped his spinners would stick to the process.

"Not expecting anything extra. They will bowl how they have done in the past. I would want that the process to be right,"

Home advantage has not always been easy to procure for the Tigers in Mirpur, where they have played 27 Tests, won eight, lost 16 and drawn the remaining three.

In the last Test here against New Zealand, Bangladesh's spin plans backfired as the hosts lost by four wickets.

Still, South Africa coming here with a relatively fresh squad with little experience of playing in Bangladesh presents a golden opportunity for the Tigers, said Shanto.

"We have never won against South Africa but this is a big opportunity for us," Shanto reminded.

By afternoon, as some fans gathered outside the Mirpur Stadium to protest Shakib's absence and another group arrived harbouring anti-Shakib sentiments, chaos ensued. There was a huge presence of security forces amidst concerns, all of which is hinting that this may end up being a Test like no other in Mirpur.

NCL

## Two tons and two fifiers on Day 2

SPORTS REPORTER

Dhaka Metro's Marshall Ayub and Aich Mollah struck hundreds against Barishal Division on the second day of one of four opening round matches of the ongoing 26th National Cricket League (NCL) at the Academy Ground of the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday.

Marshall struck 127 off 199 balls - his 25th first-class ton - while Aich made a 250-ball 122 on way to his maiden first-class hundred to help Dhaka Metro declare their first innings at 408-5.

Barishal openers Abdul Mazid and Ifakhar Hossain saw them get to 22-0 at close, still trailing by 386 runs in the first innings.

Meanwhile, at Sylhet's main venue, Rajshahi Division all-rounder SM Meherob Hasan claimed 6-35 - his maiden first-class fifer - to help his side bundle out Khulna Division for 194 in their first innings, giving his side a massive 232-run lead.

Earlier on the day, resuming with an overnight score of 385-4, a batting collapse saw Rajshahi lose their last six wickets for just 34 runs to be bowled out for 426.

Khulna pacer Al-Amin Hossain was the chief wicketeer in Rajshahi innings, claiming 5-96.

In Khulna, defending champions Dhaka Division reached 38-1 at stumps after their bowlers demonstrated a brilliant bowling performance to bundle out Sylhet Division for just 146 runs in their first innings after the opening day's game couldn't be possible due to bad weather.

In Bogura, after the first day was washed out, only 21 overs of play were possible yesterday as Rangpur Division made 69-1 at stumps after being asked to bat first by Chattogram Division.

## Messi hattrick helps Miami set MLS points record

REUTERS



Lionel Messi's hattrick led Inter Miami to an MLS single-season points record after their 6-2 victory over the New England Revolution on Saturday in Fort Lauderdale.

Despite entering the match in the 58th minute, Messi assisted a goal just seconds after coming off the bench. Messi then scored the final three of Miami's six goals, after the Herons

Lionel Messi's 11-minute hattrick for Inter Miami was his first club hattrick in four years, with the last one coming for Barcelona against Eibar in 2020.

Both Messi and Luis Suarez finished their first full MLS seasons with 20 goals apiece.

trailed 2-0 in the opening 39 minutes.

Miami (22-4-8, 74 points) broke the old mark of 73 points, set by the Revolution in 2021. With the points record and the Supporters' Shield clinched, the Herons now look to finish the story by capturing the MLS Cup.

Luis Suarez had two goals and two assists while all three of Messi's goals came between the 78th and 89th minutes.

## Ravindra helps New Zealand to famous win in India

Rachin Ravindra made a fine 134 in the first innings and then remained unbeaten on 39 in the second innings to help New Zealand to their first Test victory in India in 36 years yesterday at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru, the hometown of Ravindra's parents.

The eight-wicket win over India in the first Test in Bengaluru yesterday is New Zealand's first victory in the format in India since 1988. This is also the Black Caps' third Test win in 37 matches on Indian soil.

New Zealand also became only the third team - after Australia and England - to claim a Test victory in India since 2013.

New Zealand chased down the 107-run target with over two sessions left on the final day, being the first team to chase a 100-plus target in the fourth innings in India since 2000.

India's 462 all out in the second innings is the highest total in a home defeat for the hosts.



SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh coach Peter Butler tried to put on a brave face following the defending champions' shock 1-1 draw against Pakistan in their opening match of the SAFF Women's Championship in Kathmandu yesterday.

The Englishman, who took charge in March this year after a brief spell from Saiful Bari Titu following the resignation of long serving Golam Rabbani Choton last year, praised his team profusely while lamenting not getting 'deserved three points'.

"I'm not disappointed with how it went but I'm a realist. We march on and take the momentum from tonight's game into the next game against India on the 23rd. We'll kick on and surprise a few people," said the former West Ham midfielder.

Bangladesh were only saved utter embarrassment against a side they had beaten 6-0, thanks to a stoppage-time goal from Shamsunnahar Jr. While the women in red and green did dominate possession and shot taken, they looked anything but the force they were when they brushed aside all oppositions on their way to the maiden title two years ago under Choton.

Butler, however, felt her team played

## Butler rues not getting 'three deserved points'



A heavily bandaged Shamsunnahar Jr celebrates her last-ditch equaliser as defending champions Bangladesh came out with a 1-1 draw against Pakistan in their first Group A match of the SAFF Women's Championship at the Dasharath Stadium in Kathmandu yesterday.

PHOTO: BFF

exceedingly well and were unlucky not to get three points against a side full of 'expatriates from around the world' who got 'everyone behind the ball'.

"I'm really proud of the girls. I thought they were absolutely superb. Anybody who criticises us knows nothing about football," said Butler.

"I've played in every level, the English

Premier League and I've managed over thousand matches. And I can honestly say that I've never been involved in a game where we've dominated possession so much, controlled the whole game, played such really really good football and not really got the just deserved, which should have been the three points," the 58-year-old coach added.