

High time Mustafizur proved his worth again

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's obvious fears going into global events were well outlined in chairman of selection panel Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu's press conference during the announcement of the Champions Trophy squad on Sunday. Flat wickets or even sporting tracks, as are observed in global ICC events, have more often than not found Bangladesh wanting.

More crucially, wickets of that nature strike at the heart of Bangladesh's position of strength which is their pace-bowling prowess. Case in point is the 2023 ODI World Cup in India.

Taskin Ahmed may have been carrying the burden of injury but in Mustafizur Rahman, the Tigers wanted their 'X-factor' to really come alive. The wickets did not allow Mustafizur to settle. Ahead of the Champions Trophy, selection panel prioritised exuberance of youth, but it appears that it was mostly in batting terms, for Mustafizur had been picked on the back of experience factor — a traditional reliance on said factor thus being witnessed again.

When asked about the experience factor in the Champions Trophy squad, Lipu relayed obvious fears.

"We always look for the best available combination but we could have a new

experience [in this regard]. What I am concerned about is that with bowling being our position of strength, we couldn't defend in West Indies series. It could be a blessing in disguise that we will not be overconfident. Where we made mistakes bowling in flat wickets in terms of line and length and judgement of individual batters, we will get somewhat of an opportunity to work on rectifying those mistakes during Bangladesh's

music.

Hasan went on to show his death-bowling prowess, despite largely been out of white-ball scheme since the 2023 World Cup. The right-arm pacer turned up in the Windies T20Is having gone at 6.5 per over economy rate in the ODIs. The right arm pacer bagged four wickets at an economy of 5.08 in the T20Is and more crucially, put an exhibition of death-bowling in the T20Is. He was one of the key difference

His cutters are usually more effective on such surfaces as Sharjah's but if he is to justify his selection for Champions Trophy, the left-arm pacer needs to really produce something special.

practice sessions," the selection head said.

But if bowling on such flat wickets need to be improved upon, Mustafizur's experience appear to count more since pacers such as Hasan Mahmud and Tanzim Sakib, too, suffered in the West Indies series. Mustafizur missed out on the tour and his last series was against Afghanistan in the UAE, not the kind of batting paradise as was in West Indies where Hasan or Sakib had to face the

makers in the T20I series sweep.

Mustafizur, who had opted out of the Windies series, was Bangladesh's most successful bowler in the prior ODI series, bagging eight wickets at average of 18.12 and an economy of 5.37 in three games. But he was not tested on those batting paradises in St Kitts. He shone through his work with the new ball, bagging his first four-for in over a year in the UAE during Afghanistan ODIs.

His cutters are usually more effective

on such surfaces as Sharjah's but if he is to justify his selection for Champions Trophy, the left-arm pacer needs to really produce something special.

In 2018 Asia Cup, Mustafizur put in a masterclass with the old ball to take the Tigers to the final. His yorkers are getting more effective and his incoming deliveries now make him more of an effective bowler. In the meantime, between Jan 2023 to Jan 2025, his economy, strike-rate and average have all soared compared to his overall career. It seems Mustafizur is not at all a selection based on recent history, but one from faith and expectation.



Chittagong's foreign recruits making a difference

SPORTS REPORTER FROM SYLHET

Chittagong Kings' in-form foreign recruits Graham Clark, Usman Khan and Haider Ali once again made the difference in their side's 30-run win over Sylhet Strikers in their fourth Bangladesh Premier League T20 match in Sylhet on Monday.

England's Graham smashed 60 off 33 balls, while Pakistan's Usman and Haider contributed 53 and 42 not out, respectively, helping Chittagong post 203-6 after being asked to bat.

Consistent performances from their overseas players have been key to Chittagong's strong campaign, with three wins from four games ahead of their home phase. In contrast, Sylhet's foreign recruits struggled, as Ireland's Paul Stirling fell for a duck, USA's Aaron Jones managed just 15, and Scotland's George Munsey's 52 off 37 balls lacked impact in their chase.

Local star Jaker Ali Anik, who came in with Sylhet needing 140 from 53 balls, scored an unbeaten 47 off 23, but the target was out of reach by the time he arrived at the crease in the 11th over.

Named in Bangladesh's Champions Trophy squad, Jaker said he is currently focusing on the BPL and hopes to deliver his "best performance as per role" in the global tournament.

Nahid Rana is 'pure gold'

Former New Zealand pacer Danny Morrison, mostly known for his over-the-top commentary, is back in Bangladesh after six years for the ongoing edition of the Bangladesh Premier League T20. The 58-year-old, on Monday, spoke to The Daily Star's Samsul Arefin Khan regarding his views on the omission of Liton Das and Shakib Al Hasan from the Champions Trophy squad, Bangladesh's pace unit revolution and much more. Following are the excerpts from the interview:

DS: The day you arrived in Bangladesh, Liton Das played a gem of an innings and records tumbled in that match between Dhaka Capitals and Durbar Rajshahi. Must have enjoyed the game a lot.

DM: I think it's always like this under the lights once dew factor comes in. So at night the ball slides on which is great for the batters. And obviously the crowd loves it to be honest. The fours and sixes, entertainment, tough for the bowlers. Liton was left out of the Champions Trophy side, so probably mentally it was good for him. It's like, 'come on man and I'll show you that I'm still worth something and got the ability'.

DS: When someone gets dropped, how challenging is it for them to overcome the situation?

DM: That's the pinnacle. You want to play for your country. Even though now it's a bit different because of franchise cricket all around, but for someone like Liton, wanting to play for Bangladesh is important. So he should have his own pride of his performance and understand what you try to achieve from the game because you can't play forever. So you have a small window and I think that probably motivated Liton last night [Sunday] just to show them. And he got the conditions too

that suited him.

DS: How much will Bangladesh miss Shakib Al Hasan in the Champions Trophy?

DM: What I will say is that it's very unique here. I have seen all around the sub-continent, in terms of being in the politics, it's very challenging if you are involved in politics and you are still playing cricket. It's better to retire and then go into politics. There is also his bowling action. That's just the thing you can tidy up. So I expect Shakib to be back. He is a very competitive player.... he is a good enough player to come back and still play.

DS: Bangladesh is producing many fast bowlers in recent times. How do you evaluate the pace revolution in Bangladesh?

DM: Taskin [Ahmed] is very useful with all his experiences coming into the fold. The fizz [Mustafizur Rahman] is still around and doing his thing. Everyone loves a left-armer, right? I think because of the people you used, you got Courtney Walsh

and Allan Donald as coaches. So you find pedigree in terms of overseas coaches to develop your quick bowlers. I think that looking for outside help and resources can create and develop guys and it's exciting.

DS: What about Nahid Rana?

DM: You got to hold onto it. That's gold, pure gold. It's quite freakish. Pakistanis got few over time. And do you think it's about DNA? Not really. There is an argument whether a sprinter is made or a sprinter is born. Some guys will have a timing or action and have the athleticism to do that. I think he is just one of those.

DS: Four franchise tournaments are running concurrently across the world. Why did you choose BPL?

DM: My work area is subcontinent, UAE and the West Indies. I do these tournaments. I'm a little bit of a showman and have fun with the crowds and being interviewed or doing these. I have been coming here since 1987. I think it helps if you embrace the culture. I love the food, the people and the noise and the passion.



AUSTRALIAN OPEN

Djokovic dodges early departure

AFP, MELBOURNE

Novak Djokovic survived a scare in his quest for tennis history before joining Carlos Alcaraz and defending champion Jannik Sinner in the second round of the Australian Open yesterday.

In the women's draw, Iga Swiatek and Coco Gauff powered through with minimum fuss as they seek to dethrone two-time defending champion Aryna Sabalenka. On a blockbuster second day in Melbourne, Djokovic lost the first set to 107th-ranked American Nishesh Basavareddy in the prime-time evening match on Rod Laver Arena.

But the Serbian great, hoping to roll back the years and win an 11th Australian Open and record 25th Grand Slam singles title, recovered to pull through 4-6, 6-3, 6-4, 6-2.

Djokovic was animated at the end and struggled to raise a smile. Italian world number one Sinner was playing under a cloud after twice testing positive for traces of a steroid in March. Sinner was warmly welcomed on Rod Laver Arena before defeating Chile's Nicolas Jarry 7-6 (7/2), 7-6 (7/5), 6-1.

"I was happy about the crowd," said Sinner, who has not tasted defeat since losing to Alcaraz in the Beijing final in October. Alcaraz, a four-time Grand Slam champion but never a winner in Melbourne, had a couple of hairy moments before seeing off the challenge of Kazakhstan's Alexander Shevchenko, 6-1, 7-5, 6-1.

Earlier, the 11th-seeded Stefanos Tsitsipas became the first major casualty when Alex Michelsen blasted past him 7-5, 6-3, 2-6, 6-4. The 26-year-old Greek, who played Djokovic in the 2023 final at Melbourne Park, never looked comfortable against the 42nd-ranked American.



Flick's 'incredible' Barca win Spanish Super Cup

AGENCIES

Head coach Hansi Flick praised his "incredible" Barcelona team after 5-2 win against Real Madrid in the Spanish Super Cup final in Saudi Arabia on Sunday.

Barca came from an early goal down, scoring four goals in a dominant first half and surviving having their goalkeeper sent off to clinch a record-extending 15th trophy.

Lamine Yamal, Robert Lewandowski, Raphinha and Alejandro Balde were all on target before halftime, after French forward Kylian Mbappe put Real in front in the fifth minute. Raphinha grabbed another in the second half while Rodrygo scored for Real.

At the King Abdullah Sports City stadium, Barcelona put in a clinical display to lift their first trophy in more than a year, having no silverware to show for last season.

Barcelona and Real met in the competition's final for third consecutive time, with Ancelotti's side prevailing last year while Barca lifted the trophy in 2023.

"I'm very proud of the team, the



staff, the club, the fans... everyone who supports Barca. I am proud to manage such an incredible team," said Flick.

The Catalan side were left with 10 men when goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny was sent off for fouling Mbappe in the 56th minute and Rodrygo beat substitute keeper Inaki Pena from the resulting free kick.

But Real, who hold a five-point advantage over Barca in LaLiga after 19 games, had no shots on goal after the penalty until Mbappe's effort was denied by Pena in stoppage time.

"After Szczesny was sent off,

it wasn't easy for anyone. We, the coaches, had a little discussion, and I thank them all because, in the end, we made the right decision. And Inaki did a great job, and we defended as a team. I loved it," said Flick.

"We are a team. You could see that after the win, but it always shows. We stick together, and our aim is to learn from every game."

"At big clubs, the goal is to win titles. And that's what we're working towards. We are very happy and proud but need to keep showing that we are the best in every game," added Flick.

SHORT CORNER

Zalmi pick Rana, no takers for Shakib and Mustafizur

Bangladesh's speedster Nahid Rana has been picked by Peshwar Zalmi in the ongoing players draft for the upcoming edition of the Pakistan Super League, set to begin in April. He troubled the Pakistani batters with his pace in Bangladesh's two-Test series in Rawalpindi last year, and clearly made a lasting impression as the Zalmi franchise raised their paddle to secure the services of the right-arm fast bowler from the Gold category.

Jessy to officiate in ICC U-19 Women's T20 WC

Bangladeshi umpire Shathira Jakir Jessy is set to become the first women umpire from the country to officiate in a Cricket World Cup at any level as the ICC has named her as one of the 20 match officials who will stand in the forthcoming ICC U19 Women's T20 World Cup in Malaysia, beginning this Saturday.

Cummins to lead Australia's big guns at Champions Trophy

Pat Cummins will captain Australia at the Champions Trophy after being named in a preliminary 15-man squad also featuring fellow quick Josh Hazlewood on Tuesday. Squad: Pat Cummins (captain), Alex Carey, Nathan Ellis, Aaron Hardie, Josh Hazlewood, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Marnus Labuschagne, Mitch Marsh, Glenn Maxwell, Matt Short, Steve Smith, Mitchell Starc, Marcus Stoinis, Adam Zampa.

*Read full stories on The Daily Star website

Clubs to discuss BCB's constitution reforms

SPORTS REPORTER

The proposed changes to the constitution of the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), especially the dissolution of the Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolitan (CCDM) and the reduction of councillors from Category 2 in the BCB general council, are causing quite a furore amongst Dhaka club cricket officials.

In a scheduled meeting today, 76 clubs under the CCDM will gather to discuss their concerns over the proposed reforms. The meeting is set to take place at 3 pm at a city hotel.

It was learned that the changes would reduce the number of councillors from clubs from 12 to just four, while the number of BCB directors would drop from 25 to 21.

Club officials have vehemently criticised the new changes in TV and print media reports over the past few days. There has been criticism that reducing the number of Dhaka-based clubs undermines their significance and contribution to Bangladesh cricket.

A five-member committee led by BCB director Najmul Abedeen Fahim is handling the proposals.

"We are fine-tuning the proposal and will possibly hand it over very soon. Before that, we will have a discussion with a group of people who can see it from a neutral point of view," Fahim told The Daily Star yesterday.

The proposal will then be forwarded to the general council and, ultimately, to the National Sports Council (NSC) for approval.

Regarding the criticism and media storm surrounding the proposed changes, Fahim felt that "many of the things being said aren't right."