



## Fine-tuning THE FIZZ

Bangladesh star Mustafizur Rahman consults senior assistant coach Mohammad Salahuddin during the team's first training session ahead of the fast-approaching Champions Trophy at the National Cricket Academy in Mirpur yesterday. The 29-year-old quick, renowned for his deceptive off-cutters, will be eager to rediscover his best form, having taken 31 wickets at an average of 34.90 in his last 25 ODIs -- well above his career average of 25.88 across 107 matches. In the just-concluded Bangladesh Premier League T20, Mustafizur, representing Dhaka Capitals, finished 12th on the wicket-takers list with 13 scalps in 12 fixtures, trailing six fellow pacers who have represented the Tigers.

PHOTO: BCB

### CHAMPIONS TROPHY

## Thin turnout marks Tigers' first training

SPORTS REPORTER

As several national cricketers were engaged in the just-concluded Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) final, the first training session for the upcoming ICC Champions Trophy began with an unusual sight -- more coaches than players -- at the National Cricket Academy in Mirpur yesterday.

Fast bowlers Mustafizur Rahman, Tanzim Hasan Sakib, and batters Jaker Ali Anik, Tanzid Hasan Tamim, and Soumya Sarkar received respective guidance from head coach Phil Simmons, senior assistant coach Mohammad Salahuddin, spin coach Mushtaq Ahmed, and pace bowling coach Andre Adams. Bangladesh Cricket Board's other coaches, Sohel Islam and Talha Jubair, were on hand as well for the two-hour session.

Skipped training for obvious reasons were players like Mushfiqur Rahim, Mahmudullah Riyad, Towhid Hridoy, Rishad Hossain, Najmul Hossain Shanto and Parvez Hossain Emon were part of the BPL final, which ended late Friday night.

However, the likes of Taskin Ahmed, Nasum Ahmed, Mehedi Hasan Miraz and Nahid Rana -- whose BPL teams did not make the BPL final -- were also absent.

The camp will continue until February 12 before they leave for the UAE on February 14 to participate in the marquee event, scheduled to start on February 19.

It was initially thought that the aforementioned absentees, whose developmental years were shaped at Bangladesh Krira Shikkha Protishtan (BKSP), might go there yesterday to attend a reunion programme. However, it was learnt that none of the national players attended the programme.

Meanwhile, BPL champions Fortune Barishal are set to visit the division with their two BPL trophies won on the trot, meaning those national players who represented the team will be unlikely to show up in today's training as well.

Bangladesh, who are in Group A of the eight team Champions Trophy, will begin their campaign against India in Dubai on February 20, before facing New Zealand and Pakistan in their remaining matches on February 24 and 27, respectively, in Rawalpindi.

## ‘Always believed I can do well in T20s’

Mahidul Islam Ankon was the surprise package of the just-concluded Bangladesh Premier League (BPL). The wicketkeeper-batter, who is better known for his steadfast run-making, plundered 316 runs in 12 innings for Khulna Tigers as a finisher with an astonishing strike-rate of 174.58 -- the highest among all batters with at least 300 runs in BPL 11. The 25-year-old on Saturday talked to **The Daily Star's Samsul Arefin Khan** regarding his batting transformation, his future plans and many other things. The excerpts are as follows:

**The Daily Star (DS):** A different Ankon emerged in BPL 11. How did this transformation happen?

**Mahidul Islam Ankon (MIA):** In previous BPLs, I didn't get a lot of matches. But in the back of my mind, I always thought about how I can develop my shots, how I can make an impact batting at number six or seven. Before the season began, when the management told me about my batting position, it made things very easy and clear for me. I tried to execute my plans in the middle and whatever I have done, I'm happy with it.

**DS:** You were mostly warming the bench for Comilla Victorians in the last few editions. Do you feel unlucky for not getting more chances earlier?

**MIA:** I always believed that I could do well. I have that confidence. Due to the team combination, you may get fewer matches. At that time, I tried to improve myself day by day and not think too much. I always had the belief that whenever I get the opportunity, I can do really well in T20s.

**DS:** You made your national team debut against South Africa in last year's Chattogram Test but are yet to play in the white-ball formats. How do you view yourself, a Test specialist or someone who can excel in every format?

**MIA:** I feel very proud that I debuted for Bangladesh in Test cricket first. White-ball cricket is valued more in our country but in other Test-playing nations, Test is considered the pinnacle. I believe I can play in all

three formats. As I have debuted in Tests, I hope to continue playing in this format. And whenever I get the opportunity in white-ball, I hope to deliver good performances there as well.

**DS:** There are quite a few wicketkeeper-batters in the Bangladesh team at the moment. It must be challenging to stand out, right?

**MIA:** I personally think this challenge is a good thing for Bangladesh cricket. I feel there is similar competition in other departments as well. I think we need even more competition in the team to do better in international cricket. Because of such competition, I always feel that I have no other option but to perform. If I can perform, the Almighty will take care of the rest.

**DS:** Do you see yourself as a finisher in white-ball formats or do you want to bat in other positions?

**MIA:** Personally, batting positions don't matter to me. From my childhood, I'm used to batting in different positions. In the Dhaka Premier League, I bat in the top-order whereas in the BPL, I batted lower down. I have no issues with batting positions.

**DS:** What are your next goals? **MIA:** I always try to perform well wherever I play. I don't think much about selection. I always try to maintain my process and make myself fitter to perform better. I'm more focused on that and I always believe that one day I can do well in all three formats.



## Australia know how to win: Warner

REUTERS

Former Australia opener David Warner has backed the ODI World Cup holders to do well in the Champions Trophy later this month despite losing several key players close to the tournament.

Australia will need to make four changes to their preliminary squad for the eight-team tournament beginning on February 19 in Karachi, Pakistan.

Regular captain Pat Cummins, fellow quick Josh Hazlewood and all-rounder Mitch Marsh have been ruled out with injuries, while Marcus Stoinis withdrew himself after his shock decision to quit ODIs on Thursday.

"Australia are very good in the World Cups and Champions Trophies and in tournament play. So, the Australian team knows how to win. They know how to succeed. It doesn't matter what players they play," Warner told a virtual press conference.

"The guys are all built with playing under pressure. So, I think, whoever replaces those guys would do very well and the team in general would do great as well."

Australia have won the Champions Trophy twice, in 2006 and 2009, making them the most successful team in the tournament alongside India, who won in 2002 and 2013.

Australia are presently engaged in a two-match test series in Sri Lanka, leading 1-0 following a comprehensive innings and 242-run victory in the opening test in Galle.

Asked about Australia's decision to drop Sam Konstas and promote Travis Head as Usman Khawaja's opening partner, Warner deferred the question to the selectors. "I don't know. You'd have to ask them (selectors) why that happened," Warner said.

### WOMEN'S FOOTBALL FEUD

## No 'amicable' solution yet

SPORTS REPORTER

The deadlock in women's football remains unresolved despite efforts from Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president Tabith Awal to mediate between the 18 senior players and head coach Peter Butler.

A reliable source within the federation confirmed that Tabith, who returned from the UK on Wednesday, held separate meetings with each of the boycotting players as well as Englishman Butler, who had recently been granted a two-year contract extension.

These discussions took place late on Thursday night at the BFF House, following the submission of a report by a special seven-member probe committee. The report highlighted disciplinary breaches by the players and violations of the code of conduct by the coach.

Despite this, Tabith has taken a balanced stance, reassuring players that their concerns would be addressed while also advising Butler to adopt a more accommodating approach. However, the players remain firm in their demand for Butler's removal, as evidenced by their continued absence from training on Saturday morning.

Informing The Daily Star yesterday, Tabith expressed optimism about resolving the issue. "Where there is will, there is a way. We will most definitely come to an amicable solution soon," he said.

He reiterated his commitment to dialogue, stating, "I have met them personally and individually on Thursday evening. We will continue our engagements with the individuals because, in the football family, we are all responsible for each other and depend on each other."

The BCB boss urged all involved to act with accountability. "We will keep our conversation with all individuals confidential. However, we continue to ask those who ask questions and those who speak out to maintain the highest level of responsibility," he said.

As the dispute drags on, the training camp under Butler continues with 13 players from the original squad and 20 from the under-20 camp. Tabith confirmed that selection for the upcoming friendly matches against the UAE on February 26 and March 2 will remain open.

"There is a deadline for when we have to submit the names of the squad. Anyone who is willing and fit at the time of the deadline will be considered," stated Tabith, who assumed the role at the helm following a landslide victory in the BFF polls in late October.

A member of the probe committee, speaking anonymously, reiterated that the 18 absent players remain welcome to rejoin at any time, adding, "The ball is in their court now."



**Sri Lanka opener Dimuth Karunaratne walked off to the pavilion for the last time in national colours after he was dismissed by Australia spinner Matthew Kuhnemann on Day 3 of the second Test between the sides in Galle yesterday. The 36-year-old had announced to retire from all formats after the end of the two-match series against Australia. Sri Lanka managed to slip past a finishing blow on the third day after Angelo Matthews (76) propelled the hosts to 211-8 in response to Australia's 414 but are staring at a likely defeat today. Australia spinners Kuhnemann (4-52) and Lyon (3-80) dominated proceedings, sharing seven wickets between them.**

Karunaratne has scored the most runs as an opener for Sri Lanka in Tests. Out of his 7222 runs, 7129 have come as an opener at average of 39.83 in 96 matches. Sanath Jayasuriya comes second with 5,932 runs in 90 matches.

Off-spinner Nathan Lyon, who took his match tally to six wickets after bagging three in the second innings so far, became only the third Australian to claim 550 Test wickets, joining the exalted company of Shane Warne (708) and Glenn McGrath (563).

PHOTO: AFP



With the theme "Run for Unity, Run for Humanity" the highly anticipated Dhaka International Marathon-2025 was held in 300 Feet area of Dhaka under the overall supervision of the Bangladesh Army. Principal staff officer of the Army Lieutenant General SM Kamrul Hasan, inaugurated the event on Saturday morning. It was the largest marathon ever organised in Bangladesh with participation of around 10,000 runners. Several participants from 10 different countries also took part, further adding to the event's international appeal.

PHOTO: COLLECTED