

“We’ve obviously enjoyed the pitches in Pakistan and I think we’ve got a pretty well-balanced side to play in any conditions so hopefully we can continue to do that and adjust to what’s in front of us.”

New Zealand all-rounder **Michael Bracewell** said ahead of their final Champions Trophy Group A game against India in Dubai tomorrow



‘Good teams score not just with boundaries’

Bangladesh’s spin-bowling coach **Mushtaq Ahmed** is close to signing a two-year contract extension with the Tigers. The former Pakistan spin wizard left to be with his family in Lahore after Bangladesh’s final ICC Champions Trophy group-stage fixture got washed out in Rawalpindi but had a chat with **The Daily Star’s Samsul Arefin Khan** about Bangladesh’s disappointing campaign in the global event and some of the factors that contributed to it. The excerpts are as follows:

DS: How disappointed are you about Bangladesh’s Champions Trophy campaign?

MA: I am not disappointed really. Yes, we didn’t win the matches but there were close matches. If we had 30-40 more runs in both the matches, then it could have been a different ball game.

DS: Bangladesh always have high expectations whenever they go into an ICC event. Do you feel it’s justified?

MA: I think so, why not? If you see the Bangladeshi talents, the fast bowling, the spin department and the batting, they are ticking boxes in all the departments. But the most beautiful thing with the Bangladesh team is they are a young side that can challenge any team. You can see glimpses of that now.

Against India, we scored 220-230 runs and were almost challenging them. It was not an easy game. New Zealand also struggled against Bangladesh. If we had that run out, I mean ifs and buts always come in cricket. You can see the challenge was there. They just have to believe and learn a few things like how to rotate the strike in the middle overs, and how to get wickets in the middle overs.

DS: Teams are scoring 300-350 runs regularly, whereas Bangladesh are stuck in the 250-270 region. How much is it letting them down every game?

MA: I think getting [big] scores is very important. There is no denying that. I think the guys have been talking to each other and they have been very honest. They know this is the area they need to improve. I believe they just need to get the hang of building partnerships and how to play the 50-over format. I think of 50-over cricket as mini-Test cricket. You have to understand the phases of the game. I think there are three to four phases in batting that they need to learn how to play in.

All the good teams, why do they get 300 runs? They score these runs not with boundaries but they score singles and doubles; they learn sweeps and reverse sweeps as well.

DS: Do you think the senior duo of Mahmudullah Riyad and Mushfiqur Rahim not performing had an impact on Bangladesh’s results in the tournament?

MA: I think Mahmudullah and Mushi [Mushfiqur] have served the country for many many years. So, they have more responsibilities for sure.

When your senior players start scoring runs, it gives a lot of advantage to young

players. I think Mushi and Mahmudullah were key players for Bangladesh in this tournament but unfortunately, they couldn’t deliver. They were very disappointed, to be honest. Both of them were very down after the game because they knew that they could’ve played differently.

DS: Do you see them in the 2027 World Cup as well?

MA: You can’t close the door for anyone as long as they are fit. Obviously, the skills are there. If you are 37-39, it doesn’t matter. Lots of players, within a similar age group, are playing international matches like Virat Kohli and Adil Rashid because they are really fit. I believe that you’ve got to prepare for the upcoming World Cup with the youngsters but you’ve also got to balance the side with senior players.

DS: Updates on your contract extension with the Tigers?

MA: I’m going to sign a two-year or three-year contract. I might have to work for 130-140 days and the Bangladesh Cricket Board will also determine the capacity of my work. I think my role will be to work with local spinners to build bench strength. I will be joining Bangladesh in their series against Pakistan in May.



CWAB to employ fresh method to solve payment issues

SPORTS REPORTER

The Cricketers Welfare Association of Bangladesh (CWAB) has decided to include players from every division in the decision-making process while discussing salary-related issues with the board after a meeting with local players yesterday who had to accept lower payments for the recent edition of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) and the forthcoming Dhaka Premier League (DPL).

A few national team players had met with the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Faruque Ahmed after he took charge to discuss BPL and had suggested that the tournament should be played even if the players have to accept a lower paycheck.

But this suggestion of theirs did not go down well with rest of the players in the domestic circuit as DPL clubs have also followed suit and offered significantly reduced contracts for players for the next edition, set to begin on March 3.

Yesterday, some 50-60 players, which included Tamim Iqbal, Anamul Haque Bijoy attended the meeting in Mirpur.

“Today [Friday] it was decided that in such issues, players from the second division through to the premier division will take part in the decision-making process and no one will individually handle such decisions,” a cricketer who was in yesterday’s meeting told **The Daily Star**.

CWAB has also appointed barrister Shihab Uddin Khan to represent the cricketers’ in payment disputes.

CWAB has been without a president since Naimur Rahman Durjoy resigned after the fall of the Awami League regime. In the meeting, it was decided that a decision on elections will take place during the upcoming DPL, slated to begin on March 3.

Buttler quits as captain

Jos Buttler said on Friday he is to step down as England’s limited-overs captain after a disastrous Champions Trophy campaign ended with them failing to reach the semifinals.

Buttler will step down from captaincy after their final Champions Trophy game against South Africa in Karachi today.

“I’m going to stand down as England captain, it’s the right decision for me and the team,” the 34-year-old said at a press conference.

England failed to retain either their T20 and 50-over World Cup titles under Buttler’s captaincy.

Proteas wary of underperforming England

AFP, Karachi

South Africa coach Rob Walter said his team will be wary of an under-performing England, who have the ability to beat anyone on their day, when they meet in a key Champions Trophy match on Saturday.

The sides face off in Karachi with South Africa still in contention to reach the semifinals of the 50-over tournament, while England are already out.

South Africa hammered Afghanistan in their opener, but their second match against Australia was washed out without a ball being bowled.

They now take on a wounded England whose captain Jos Buttler stepped down from white-ball captaincy yesterday.

“League cricket around the world, they do well, which should suggest that they’re adaptable,” Walter told reporters.

“If you look at the names on the sheet, I think there’s some quality



players there, there’s no doubt about that.

“Cricket can be fickle and sometimes that results in you losing.

“To ask if I’m surprised [by England’s performance], as I said I think there’s good cricketers that could turn out tomorrow and deliver an international standard performance,” he added.

Buttler, who has been under pressure to relinquish the leadership of the white-ball team, was unable to replicate England’s success as ODI and T20 captain since he led them to a T20 World Cup title in 2022.

England won only three of their nine matches as defending champions at the 50-over World Cup in India in 2023.

They faltered in the semifinal of last year’s T20 World Cup and recently suffered a 3-0 ODI whitewash in India before the Champions Trophy.

Walter, meanwhile, said Proteas wicketkeeper-batter Heinrich Klaasen is set to return to the team after missing the opener due to an elbow injury.

Batting at number four, Klaasen has been the accumulator and aggressor for South Africa in white-ball cricket and remains key to their title goals.

“He’s a super player, isn’t he?,” said Walter.

“And I think that you probably notice his strength also based on who the guys are around him that allow him to play that way.

“Obviously he’s got a skill-set at the moment that is right up there with the world’s best, I think we all agree with that.

“And it’s great to have him in your team because you know how destructive he can be.”

Oldest Test cricketer Ron Draper no more

AFP, Gqeberha



Ron Draper, who was the oldest living Test cricketer, has died in Gqeberha at the age of 98 years and 63 days, his family said Friday.

Draper died in a retirement home in Gqeberha on Tuesday. His death was confirmed by his son-in-law, Neil Thomson, on Friday.

Draper, a top-order batter and occasional wicketkeeper, played in two Test matches for South Africa against Australia in 1950.

One of his opponents, Neil Harvey, now becomes the oldest living Test player at the age of 96.

Both previous oldest Test cricketers were South Africans – Norman Gordon, who died aged 103 in 2016, and John Watkins, who was 98 when he died in 2021.

Draper, who was born on 24 December 1926, made a century on first-class debut for Eastern Province against Orange Free State on his 19th birthday.

After making 86 for the province against the touring Australians in 1949/50, he was selected for the last two Tests against the tourists but scored only 25 runs in three innings.

Draper continued to play first-class cricket until 1959/60 and finished with a respectable average of 41.64. He also became the first to score two centuries in a match in South Africa’s Currie Cup competition in 1952/53 season.

Hosts’ exit deflates CT buzz in Pakistan

AFP, Karachi

Champions Trophy fever in Pakistan has plummeted after the hosts crashed out of the first major cricket event in the country in three decades without winning a game.

“It feels like attending a wedding where you don’t know the bride or groom,” said Kashan Khan, a medical student who watched Pakistan get beaten by New Zealand by 60 runs in the opening match in Karachi last week.

The defending champions then lost to great rivals India by six wickets to seal their fate, before their dead-rubber last group game against Bangladesh was washed out.

“Pakistan’s poor performance has drained my enthusiasm. I don’t care about watching other teams now,” added Khan.

Pakistan’s failure to advance beyond the group phase or even win a game was a huge letdown in a country that has been gradually returning to hosting international teams after years of militancy saw it marked as a no-go zone.

Outside Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium, ticket-holders were seen trying to sell their unwanted seats ahead of Pakistan’s match against Bangladesh, but there were no takers.

“I had three tickets but no one wanted to buy them,” said Farooq Ali. “I even tried giving them away for free, but my friends weren’t interested.”

For many, the final on March 9 holds little appeal, particularly given its location is still undecided.

Archrivals India refused to visit its neighbour and are playing all their matches in Dubai. India are into the semifinals and if they reach the title decider, the final will be moved from Lahore to Dubai. “If Pakistan isn’t playing in it, why should we care?” asked Amna Mashadi, who watched the tournament on television.

New traditions but same old hospitality in modern Islamabad

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN from Islamabad

Since its foundation in the 1960s, Pakistan’s capital Islamabad has always been a well-planned city, with separate zones for administration, educational and commercial institutions and residential areas – unlike most major cities in the Indian sub-continent.

The infrastructure in Islamabad had always been top-notch and has been further spruced up over time, and from the looks of it, the city’s residents have also adopted new traditions with the changing of times.

While visiting tourist hubs like Shah Faisal Mosque and Pakistan Monument, and while roaming around the city’s amusement parks, malls and cineplexes, this reporter saw many families out and about, enjoying themselves.

Similar scenes could be seen in restaurants as well, with people queuing up in front of top-billed eateries like TKR and Dome and also visiting the lesser-known restaurants to gorge on the many scrumptious traditional food items such as kebabs, halim, kabuli pulao, biryani, dum pukht and nihari.



To Sayeed Khan, a Pakistani businessman who lives in Brunei and has come to Islamabad to meet his family, seeing families and especially women in public spaces signified a significant social change.

“Earlier, people used to eat at home but now it is completely different. They like to eat outside with family and friends. Women didn’t use to eat outside and it was considered a bad gesture. But now they are going out with family and friends,” Sayeed said.

Tarek Mahmud, a Bangladeshi sports journalist from Prothom Alo who last visited the city during the Islamabad



SAFF Games in 2004, feels the city has adopted modernity without spoiling its beauty.

“I saw some skyscrapers, nice shopping malls and branded shops this time which is new compared to my last visit here in 2004... They have made changes without spoiling the beauty of the city. The roads are very clean. The transportation is also excellent,” said Mahmud.

Amidst all the changes, one thing that has remained the same in Islamabad is its hospitality.

The people of Pakistan are known for their friendly nature and

hospitality towards guests and from the experiences of this reporter who is visiting this part of the world for the first time to cover the ICC Champions Trophy, this reputation is more than justified.

From taxi drivers to hotel receptionists, salesmen in shops to the wait staff in restaurants, people in Islamabad are welcoming and are always willing to go the extra mile to help their guests.

The level of security in the city is palpable as the local law enforcement agencies have left no stone unturned to ensure there are no hitches.

These extra measures are not at all unwarranted, proved by the suicide bombing that took five lives yesterday in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, a northwestern region of the country. So far, there have not been any such incidents in the cities where the tournament is taking place and even though the locals are heartbroken by Pakistan’s early exit, they have opened their hearts to make this a delightful experience for every guest who has made the trip for the tournament.