

Bangladesh not keen to experiment against Zimbabwe

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

Cricketers began returning to Mirpur yesterday after the Eid holidays as teams started preparation for the resumption of the Dhaka Premier League (DPL) on Sunday.

However, the DPL teams will get the services of the Test team cricketers till April 9, as the national team's preparation camp ahead of the two-Test series against Zimbabwe is set to begin in Sylhet on either April 10 or 11.

The series, which will begin on April 20 at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium, will be the Tigers' first Test encounter against Zimbabwe since July 2021, which they won by 220 runs in Harare.

From then till now, the gulf between Bangladesh and Zimbabwe in Tests have seemingly widened further, with the Tigers experiencing more success than their African counterparts.

Since March 1, 2021, Bangladesh have won eight out of 29 Tests which included a historical Test win against New Zealand in Mount Maunganui, a maiden Test series win over Pakistan in Pakistan and a Test win over West Indies in the Caribbean after 15 years.

On the other hand, since their 10-wicket win over Afghanistan in Abu Dhabi in March 2021, Zimbabwe have lost seven out of their next nine Tests and have failed to register any victory in the last four years.

As Bangladesh will be playing at home against a



PHOTO: STAR

relatively weaker opposition and with a jam-packed schedule coming up where they will play at least 18 Tests in next two years, the question of whether the Tigers should test out some newcomers in the Zimbabwe series automatically rises.

However, selector Abdur Razzak ruled out any chances of experimentation, saying, "Actually, we need to form the team first. There is hardly any scope for experimentation."

Razzak pointed out the lack of experienced Test players as a reason for not wanting to test new players even though there are currently four cricketers in the team – Mushfiqur Rahim (94 Tests), Mominul Haque (69), Taijul Islam (51) and Mehedi Hasan Miraz (51) – who have played more than 50 Tests.

"We hardly have players who have played more than 20 Tests apart from Mushfiqur. So, we need to give the young players exposure in this series to prepare them well for the upcoming big series," Razzak told The Daily Star yesterday.

But former skipper and current Dhamondi Sports Club head coach Mohammad Ashraful felt Bangladesh can call up a few players who performed well in the National Cricket League (NCL) against an opposition like Zimbabwe.

"I think those who have done well in the NCL, they have to be given the opportunity here... I think we can afford to try out two to three players against a team like Zimbabwe," Ashraful told The Daily Star.

Meanwhile, Razzak informed that they have almost finalised the squad for the Test series.

"We will submit the names within next one or two days. The board will then decide when they will announce the squad," he said.



'As long as I'm fit, I'll play Tests'

Bangladesh's 22-year-old pace sensation Nahid Rana has sharply come into focus for his raw pace, which has availed him an opportunity to compete in the Pakistan Super League (PSL). The speedster has been given a No Objection Certificate (NOC) from the cricket board for PSL after the first Test against Zimbabwe and while PSL beckons, Rana's ambition lay in Test cricket which he divulged during an interview with The Daily Star's Abdullah Al Mehdi yesterday. Here are the excerpts:

DS: You have just come back after the Eid festivities. On social media, you had poked fun at Shoriful Islam's fishing technique during the Eid break, did you get to do the things you love during the vacation as well?

NR: My plan is that I will retire from all the other formats before I take my bow from Tests. It's the last format I want to retire from because if I can do that then my fitness would be good along with other aspects of my bowling. If I can play Test cricket for a long time, it would be good for me and for the country. Out of the three formats, it's the most prestigious. So, as long as I am fit and able to play, I will continue playing Tests.

DS: Has James Anderson or anyone else inspired you to think like this?

NR: Actually, my situation is not completely similar to Anderson's because the weather there is very different to ours. There will be many scenarios unfolding in future and I don't want to think too far ahead. Instead, I am staying in the present. For example, right now I am thinking about what I would do if I get to play against Zimbabwe and preparing accordingly.

DS: When you hit 152 kph at Rawalpindi, was it a surprise for

you? Is there a speed you aspire to hit?

NR: Pace is never a surprise for me because I have been working hard, maintaining myself and eating properly. Rather than being surprised, I feel that anything can happen at any time [pacewise].

I don't want to be like anyone else or break someone's record. What I want is to create my own records. As far as a wish or an aspiration goes, there is nothing bigger than winning a major trophy for the team.

DS: Is your run-up the key behind your pace?

NR: While growing up, I always felt I was quick. But I mostly played with taped tennis balls back then. When I started playing with a cricket ball near the end of 2019, slowly things started to improve. I was so excited when I got a cricket ball in my hand for the first time as before I had only seen it on TV. It was a little heavier. I feel the smooth run-up and the jump generates the pace for me and when those things click, my wrist position automatically zones in.

LEWANDOWSKI, MBAPPE battle ignites La Liga title race

AGENCIES

As the 2025 La Liga season reaches its climax, an intense battle is unfolding on two fronts—at the top of the table and in the race for the Pichichi trophy. Barcelona leads Real Madrid by just three points, and their star striker, Robert Lewandowski, edges Madrid's Kylian Mbappe by three goals in the scoring charts.

The Catalans prepare to host sixth-placed Real Betis on Saturday, while Real Madrid welcomes relegation-threatened Valencia. With only a handful of matches left, every point and every goal could be decisive. Last weekend exemplified the relentless contest between the two forwards—Mbappe's brace secured a thrilling 3-2 win over Leganes, only for Lewandowski to respond with two goals of his own in a commanding 4-1 victory over Girona.



Lewandowski, 36, remains a relentless force, netting nine goals in his last nine league games. With 38 goals in 43 matches across all competitions, he continues to defy age-related doubts. "People talk about

my age, but I've worked hard for years to stay at this level. I feel just as strong as before," he stated confidently.

Barcelona manager Hansi Flick reaffirmed Lewandowski's commitment to team success. "He wants the Pichichi,

but the most important thing is the team. He understands that," said Flick.

On the other hand, Mbappe, at 26, is carving out his own legacy at Madrid. His 33 goals in 46 appearances this season have drawn comparisons to Cristiano Ronaldo's debut campaign at the club. "It's special to match Ronaldo's numbers," admitted the French forward. With 12 league goals in 2025—more than any other player—he is determined to keep scoring.

Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti believes Mbappe could follow in Ronaldo's footsteps. "He has the potential to be a legend," he remarked. And with Vinicius Junior promising to help his teammate claim the top scorer's crown, Madrid's attack will be relentless against a weakened Valencia side missing key defenders.

With only a few matches remaining, the race for both the title and the Pichichi remains wide open. Lewandowski and Mbappe will push each other to the limit, knowing that every goal could be the difference between glory and disappointment.

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SHORT CORNER

Guardiola hails De Bruyne's greatness



Pep Guardiola hailed Kevin De Bruyne as one of the Premier League's greatest midfielders after the Belgian announced his departure from Manchester City

at season's end. "He is one of the greatest midfielders ever to play in this country and for this club – there is no doubt," Guardiola said. De Bruyne, 33, has been instrumental in City's success, with 106 goals and 174 assists in 413 appearances since 2015, helping secure 14 major trophies, including six Premier League titles and the 2023 Champions League. Despite injury setbacks, Guardiola praised his consistency and impact, suggesting De Bruyne deserves a statue like City legends Kompany, Silva, and Aguero.

SAFF clears Salahuddin's path to re-election by scrapping age cap

The SAFF Extraordinary Congress 2025 in Colombo today removed the 70-year age restriction for its presidency, ensuring that Kazi Salahuddin, who will be 72 in 2026, remains eligible for re-election. With continuity in store, Salahuddin pledged to expand competitions and improve governance to make South Asian football more competitive.

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'Windies favourites, Bangladesh and others neck and neck'

SPORTS DESK

Former Pakistan women's team captain Sana Mir named West Indies as favourites and said that the other five sides including Bangladesh are "neck-and-neck" in the upcoming ICC Women's World Cup Qualifier in Pakistan, set to begin on April 9.

"It will be a close tournament. West Indies are perhaps favourites but the rest are quite neck-and-neck," Sana told the ICC yesterday.

In the round-robin format tournament set to take place in Lahore, all six teams will face off against each other and the top two sides will qualify for the ODI World Cup, which will take place in India later this year.

On paper, West Indies, Pakistan and Bangladesh are top contenders for the two available spots in the main event, however, Sana felt that the remaining three sides – Ireland, Scotland and Thailand – could also pose a threat.

"It will be a tough competition. West Indies have done brilliantly in the last couple of years, especially under Hayley Matthews. Bangladesh have done quite well in ODIs in the last couple of years, they have beaten India in an ODI and done well against South Africa and Ireland," said the former off-spinner.

"Ireland have looked good, they were able to beat England last year, Scotland have also played well under Kathryn Bryce, they have more international and league exposure than before.

"You can never write Thailand off with the work ethic they have, they put in so much hard work, and if more opportunities are given to Associate nations, they will rise up really quickly," she added.

Bangladesh will begin their campaign against Thailand on April 10. The Tigresses will face Pakistan in their final game on April 19, the same day the curtain will fall on the event.



Chelsea secured a crucial 1-0 victory over London rivals Tottenham Hotspur on Thursday, courtesy of a goal from Argentina's Enzo Fernández. The win boosted their hopes of a Champions League return, propelling them back into fourth place in the Premier League. Chelsea now sit one point ahead of Manchester City in fifth and two clear of Newcastle United in sixth—while also holding a game in hand—as the battle for Champions League qualification intensifies.

PHOTO: REUTERS