

Selectors stick to tried and tested names for first Zim Test

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) yesterday announced the squad for the upcoming first home Test against Zimbabwe, set to begin in Sylhet on April 20. The most notable omission is pace spearhead Taskin Ahmed, and his absence paves the way for a maiden Test call-up for young pacer Tanzim Hasan Sakib.

Taskin is suffering from an Achilles tendon issue and will miss the entire series against Zimbabwe, BCB chief physician Debashish Chowdhury was quoted as saying in a media release. Having also sat out Mohammedan's last two Dhaka Premier League (DPL) matches, the club awaits further medical reports before confirming Taskin's return to domestic action.

Right-arm fast bowler Khaled Ahmed makes a return after he was excluded following last year's India Test series, while Nahid Rana, Hasan Mahmud, and Sakib make up the pace battery. Rana, however, is set to depart after the first Test to play in the franchise-based Pakistan Super League.

While there was room for experimentation in the batting order, the selectors have gone with the tried and tested. Shadman Islam, Mahmud Hasan Joy, and Zakir Hasan were included as



Pacer Tanzim Sakib, thus far considered as a white-ball specialist, got his first call-up to the Bangladesh Test side.

BANGLADESH SQUAD (FIRST TEST)

Najmul Hossain Shanto (c), Mahmud Hasan Joy, Shadman Islam, Zakir Hasan, Mominul Haque, Mashfiqur Rahim, Mahidul Islam, Jaker Ali Anik, Mehidy Hasan Miraz (vc), Taijul Islam, Nayeem Hasan, Nahid Rana, Hasan Mahmud, Khaled Ahmed, Tanzim Sakib.

ZIMBABWE SQUAD

Craig Ervine (c), Brian Bennett, Johnathan Campbell, Ben Curran, Trevor Gwandu, Wessly Madhevere, Wellington Masakadza, Vincent Masekese, Nyasha Mayayo, Blessing Muzarabani, Richard Ngarava, Victor Nyachi, Tafadzwa Tsiga, Nicholas Welch, Sean Williams.

openers. All three have featured regularly, and chief selector Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu reminded that all three -- especially Joy or Zakir -- have the opportunity to solidify their positions in the side.

Mashfiqur Rahim and skipper Nazmul Hossain Shanto, meanwhile, return after the West Indies series. The return of the experienced duo meant Shahadat Hossain Dipu was excluded.

Moreover, middle-order batter Mahidul Islam Ankon was included as Liton Das will be playing in the PSL, while

spinner Nayeem Hasan returned in place of Hasan Murad.

The chief selector talked about the lack of experimentation in this series, which had been expected as it is not part of the ICC World Test Championship cycle.

"We are returning to the Test format after almost four-and-a-half months. Then we have the Sri Lanka series in June. That's why we didn't want to do any experiments."

While it might have been prudent to

give opportunities to youngsters such as Dipu, who impressed in the West Indies tour, or others against a relatively weaker opponent at home, Lipu said the opportunity is there for them to feature against New Zealand A in May or Bangladesh HP's series against South Africa at home.

The recent underperformance of the top order was also an issue in the squad announcement. "It's very important for us to do well, especially at home. We haven't been able to do well against Sri Lanka and South Africa last year.

"We are entering red-ball by playing white-ball cricket, so it will be a challenge," Lipu said, adding the series is an opportunity to improve those performances, in batting and bowling terms, to be better prepared for the Sri Lanka tour in June-July.

Lipu further informed pacer Ebadot Hossain, currently playing DPL, is being "observed". Regarding 22-year-old Tanzim -- who has featured in 16 first-class matches but has already played in 10 ODIs and 18 T20Is for the Tigers -- he said the right-arm has featured in white-ball cricket and "has shown potential" in the white-ball format.

"There is an eagerness to do well. Tanzim has got the pace and ability to take wickets and was included."

Rebel footballers train under Butler

SPORTS REPORTER

Following a 68-day stand-off, most of the senior women footballers of Bangladesh team returned to training under head coach Peter Butler for the first time yesterday.

Thirteen of the 18 footballers, who had boycotted training under Butler since January 30, calling for his resignation trained for more than an hour under the guidance of the Englishman at the Abahani ground in Dhamondi on Tuesday morning.

Four other senior members -- Sabina Khatoon, Ritu Porna Chakma, Matsushima Sumaiya, and Monika Chakma -- are currently in Bhutan gearing up to play for Paro FC in the country's domestic league, while Tohura Khatoon is expected to join the camp later.

Signs looked ominous and pointed towards a continuation of the standoff as none of the boycotting players joined the gym session supervised by Butler at the BFF House on Saturday. However, later in the day a meeting between the coach and the 13 seniors took place, with BFF's women's committee chairman Mahfuza Akter Kiron in mediation, where the coach had reportedly asked the players to start training on his terms and forget the rift that had held women's football hostage for so long.

The training camp, which features both senior players and under-20 players, aims to prepare the senior team for June's Asian Cup Qualifiers in Myanmar as well as the SAFF Under-20 Women's Championship in Dhaka in July.

WOMEN'S WC QUALIFIERS

Tigresses end preparation on a high

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's team made a strong finish to their preparation for the Women's World Cup Qualifiers with a 167-run win against Pakistan 'A' in their second warm-up match at the Gaddafi Stadium in Lahore on Tuesday.

Thanks to a fine batting effort by the batters, the Tigresses posted a decent total of 276 all out in 49.4 overs after having opted to bat first.

Skipper Nigar Sultana Joty led the side from the front with an innings-high 70 runs while Farzana Haque and Jannatul Ferdous contributed with 50 and 46 runs respectively.

For Pakistan 'A', Umm-e-Hani and Waheeda Akhtar took three wickets each while Tania Saeed claimed two wickets.

Pakistan 'A', in reply, lost wickets at regular intervals as they failed to produce any fight and were bowled out for 109 runs in 39.1 overs.

Dua Majid top-scored for the hosts with 32 runs while Umm-e-Hani made 26. For Bangladesh, Rabeya Khan, Marufa Akter and Fatima Khatoon took two wickets each.

Bangladesh had earlier beaten Scotland by five wickets in the first warm-up match at the LCCA Ground on Sunday.

The Tigresses will begin their qualifiers campaign against Thailand on Thursday, a day after the tournament gets underway. Hosts Pakistan will take on Ireland while Scotland square off against West Indies in the opening day's fixtures.



'Bowlers are delivering, now batters need to perform'

In 2022, Zakir Hasan became only the fourth Bangladeshi batter to score a hundred on Test debut against India. He backed up that performance with a few more impressive knocks but in the last few series, the 27-year-old wicketkeeper-batter has failed to live up to expectations. With the Test series against Zimbabwe coming up, Zakir, who has been named in the 15-man squad for the first Test, expressed his expectations from the series during an interview with *The Daily Star's Samsul Arefin Khan*. The excerpts are as follows:

The Daily Star (DS): Bangladesh will be playing a Test series after a gap of almost five months. During this period, the players have mostly played white-ball cricket. Would adjusting to the red-ball be an issue?

Zakir Hasan (ZH): Of course, this is a difficult situation for all the players. When you play in one or two formats for three to four months and then play in another format, it's quite difficult.

But as professional cricketers, we can't use it as an excuse. We don't play Tests as frequently as some other teams. It becomes a problem for the players who are in a flow in the format but then have to wait for a while for another series. But I feel every player who plays in this format always tries to remain mentally prepared for it.

DS: Your Test career started well, but now your presence in the playing XI has become sporadic. What are your expectations from the Zimbabwe series?

ZH: I think this series is very important for me. If I get the opportunity to play, I will try to regain my lost rhythm. I want

to maintain the process and deliver my best performance.

DS: You made your international debut in the T20 format back in 2018 and have delivered with the bat in previous editions of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL). Still, you are labelled as a red-ball cricketer. What's your view on that?

ZH: It's somewhat frustrating to me. In 2018, I got the chance to play one T20I and then I didn't get any more matches. To be honest, I had no idea that I was going to get picked for the T20I side at that time. Before that series, there was a camp consisting of 33 players but I wasn't picked for that. But all of a sudden, I was picked for the side. After that, I was told by the selectors that I would be picked in another series but as I was struggling with some injuries, I was unable to play.

I also got the opportunity to play in two ODIs but in separate times. It's difficult to play when you are being picked after a while or when there is some gap between your selection. Those were good opportunities for me but I couldn't grab them. But at the same time, if I'm given assurance that I'm not getting picked for only one match and will be able to play in one or two series, it will be easier for me and for the other players to prepare accordingly. I love Test cricket but I don't want to be labelled as only a Test player. I want to be a three-format cricketer.

DS: With some seniors no longer in the Test team, do you feel there is an added responsibility on others right now?

ZH: I think Bangladesh cricket is very grateful to those senior cricketers. They have brilliantly served the team. But if you want to win matches, everyone, not just the seniors, will have to contribute in the same way. As a top order batter, I have to play my part as others have to do so in their positions. I think everyone should take responsibility. If we can score 650 to 700 runs collectively in two innings, we have the ability to win matches. We are taking 20 wickets consistently at the moment. Now it's the responsibility of the batters, from the top to number seven, to perform from their respective positions.

High-flying Barca host struggling Dortmund



Even though Borussia Dortmund are enduring a disappointing domestic season, their Champions League quarterfinal first-leg against Barcelona on Thursday night still makes up for an enthralling contest. Dortmund, the runners-up of the last edition, will be visiting Barca, who are on top of LaLiga points table. Meanwhile, the other fixture on the night features a high-flying PSG, who have already been confirmed as Ligue 1 champions, and Aston Villa.



Meanwhile, this is set to be the first meeting in European competition between PSG and Aston Villa.

Aston Villa's Unai Emery has won just two of his 10 games against PSG's Luis Enrique as a manager, with both wins coming at home.

PSG have won 21 of their 23 games and scored 73 goals in 2025 -- most wins and goals by any team from Europe's top five leagues this calendar year.

Barcelona are unbeaten in their five meetings with Borussia Dortmund in European competition (W3 D2).

Barca coach Hansi Flick has won all six of his meetings with Dortmund across all competitions during spells with Bayern Munich and Barcelona.

Barcelona have scored 32 Champions League goals this season, their most in a season since 2011-12 (35).

Mitul's Abahani defy odds in Fed Cup classic

SPORTS REPORTER

Mitul Marma was on the verge of becoming a villain, but the national goalkeeper emerged as the hero in a thrilling penalty shootout as 10-man Abahani triumphed 4-2 over reigning champions Bashundhara Kings in Qualifier 1 of the Federation Cup in Cumilla yesterday.

Abahani's triumph meant the 12-time champions advanced to the final, leaving three-time champions Kings to play in Qualifier 2 against Rahmatganj MFS, who defeated Brothers Union 2-1 in the Eliminator fixture at Rofiq Uddin Bhuiyan Stadium in Mymensingh yesterday.

In the highly anticipated match at Shaheed Dharendranath Datta Stadium, neither Kings nor Abahani could create any clear-cut chances in the first half, but the holders headed to the interval with an extra-man advantage after Abahani defender Asaduzzaman Bablu received a second yellow card in the 42nd minute.

Making the most of the momentum, Kings pressed hard and were duly rewarded in the 57th minute when Mojibur Rahman Jonny, capitalising on a misunderstanding between Mitul and substitute central-back Shakil Ahmed, netted the ball home.

However, Abahani looked different after conceding the lead, and at one stage, coach Maruf Haque sent in three forwards, compromising the backline. The decision soon paid off with substitute Arman Faisal Akash striking the equaliser in the 84th minute, firing a rebound after Brazilian midfielder Raphael Augusto



struck the post from a free kick.

The match eventually rolled into the shootout after extra time failed to produce any decider, before the country's No.1 Mitul showed his character, amending his mistakes to drive Abahani into the final in the dramatic shootout, becoming the Player of the Match in the process.

After seeing his teammate miss the first shot -- the only one in five attempts -- Mitul stopped Kings' third shot from Rabby Hossain Rahal before Kings' new signing Daciel Santos floated the fourth shot over the crossbar, leaving Abahani players and coaching staff in raptures.

"We could easily have avoided

conceding the lead had Mitul come forward, but later he performed well under the post," Abahani head coach Maruful told *The Daily Star* over the phone.

"After being reduced to 10 men, we invited Kings into our midfield and then built up the attack quickly, with Raphael and Emeka [Ogbigh] helping control the midfield as well as creating chances."

Interestingly, Abahani had beaten Kings only twice in their previous 16 meetings before the start of the current season, but the Sky Blues managed to beat Kings in both season meetings -- starting with a 1-0 win in a Bangladesh Premier League encounter.