

Kiwis weather spin test

SPORTS REPORTER

New Zealand A showed resilience against Bangladesh A's spin attack on a rain-hit second day of the second four-day match at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. At stumps, the visitors were 104 for 1, trailing by 253 runs.

Despite the pitch offering turn, the spin trio of Hasan Murad, Nayeem Islam, and Nasum Ahmed failed to break through. The only wicket came from pacer Khaled Ahmed, who removed opener Rhys Mariu. Curtis Heaphy remained unbeaten on 41, while Joe Carter added a solid 48 before play was halted.

Earlier, Bangladesh A resumed on 225 for four and reached 357 all out. Amite Hasan anchored the innings with a patient 67 off 110 balls, while Nurul Hasan Sohan's brisk 48 off 40 deliveries lifted the total. With a decent first-innings score on the board, Bangladesh will hope their spinners can make an impact over the final two days.



SPORTS REPORTER

Mehedi Hasan Miraz has been called up to Bangladesh's T20I squad for the upcoming Pakistan tour, replacing Soumya Sarkar, who has been ruled out with a back injury. Miraz, recently roped in by Lahore Qalandars in the Pakistan Super League, is set to join the squad in Lahore. The three-match T20I series begins on May 28 at the Gaddafi Stadium.

Miraz, who has played 29 T20Is, last appeared in the shortest format during Bangladesh's tour of the West Indies in December last year.

Regarding Soumya's medical assessment, national team physio Bayjedul Islam Khan confirmed: "The injury requires an extended rehabilitation period of approximately 10 to 12 days. This effectively means that he [Soumya Sarkar] will not be available for next week's three-match series in Pakistan."

Bangladesh's crises go beyond the scoreboard

SAMSUL AREFIN KHAN

Learning from mistakes is typically a sign of growth, even admirable. But when Bangladesh captain Liton Das leaned on that familiar line after his team's 2-1 T20I series defeat to the UAE -- a result that marked a historic low -- the words felt more like a reflex than reflection.

Although the message might seem reasonable on its own, coming from a team that has stumbled over the same hurdles time and again, repeating such lines without real change only deepens the frustration.

In less than a month, Bangladesh cricket suffered two blows that have shaken their foundation. First, they lost a home Test match to Zimbabwe for the first time in over six years -- a team traditionally considered beatable in subcontinental conditions. Then came the unthinkable: a series loss to UAE, a side ranked six places below them in T20I standings and with no prior series win against Bangladesh.

Short-lived highs and scattered tournament flashes have long papered over the cracks -- but Wednesday's result tore through the facade. Former captains Habibul Bashar, Minhajul Abedin Nannu, and Khaled Mashud Pilot didn't mince words: this isn't just a passing stumble. It's a full-blown crisis in Bangladesh cricket.

"There's no excuse for such defeat," Bashar told The Daily Star yesterday. "It's pathetic and shocking. UAE played like favourites in all three matches. Even the one we won, we were lucky. This can't be explained away."

Bashar demanded accountability. "You need to identify how you can lose a series to a team like UAE. The responsible authority must come up with an explanation."

The panic isn't unfounded. Bangladesh cricket, once a promising force in the 50-over format, has lost its grip. A decade ago, they were giant killers in ICC

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Former Bangladesh captain Khaled Mashud Pilot

tournaments. Now, they sit at number 10 in ODI rankings, plagued by inconsistency, incoherent planning, and declining public interest.

Former chief selector Minhajul pointed to strategic confusion and poor planning as the main reasons behind the nosedive. "We need to evaluate our long-term plan and see whether our strategies are even

working," he said. "Selection, format specialisation, team management -- everything needs a rethink."

While he urged patience in not judging the team based on just one or two bad series, he admitted that things aren't heading in the right direction. "The cricketing ecosystem isn't in good shape. It's not about off-field distractions; it's the lack of clarity and direction on the field."

Pilot believes the rot begins at the roots -- the domestic structure. "It's not a sudden collapse," he said. "Our domestic culture has deteriorated, and that shows in our international results. We simply don't have enough quality players coming through."

Pilot, known for his sharp assessments, was blunt in his warning. "This should be a wake-up call. We are losing to small teams because there is no professional attitude -- neither from the players nor from the management. The system is failing."

Indeed, while cricket is a game of glorious uncertainties, repeated failures against teams with far fewer resources hint at something systemic.

Whether this series defeat will serve as a wake-up call or fade into another chapter of unmet potential depends entirely on how swiftly and seriously the board, team management, and players respond.

Whether this series defeat jolts the system or slips quietly into the growing pile of misfiring rests on one factor -- the urgency and intent with which the board, team management, and players choose to act.

A parting rich in meaning for Rana

ANISUR RAHMAN

In a country where footballers rarely bid farewell on their own terms, former Bangladesh captain and goalkeeper Ashrafur Islam Rana is set for a rare and poetic exit.

The 38-year-old will retire today after featuring for Brothers Union in a Bangladesh Premier League clash against Mohammedan Sporting Club -- the very team where his top-flight journey began in 2014.

As Rana takes his final bow in Cumilla, he will also witness his first club lift the league trophy after 23 years, having already confirmed the BPL title with three games to spare. The Black and Whites are set to don special champion jerseys at the Shaheed Dhirendranath Datta Stadium, while local supporters are expected to contribute to the celebration in their own way.

"It is going to be an emotional moment for me, and I am really happy that I am going to call my time from the ground," Rana told reporters during Brothers Union's practice session at Gopibagh yesterday.

Asked why he chose this particular fixture for his swansong, Rana replied: "I chose Mohammedan because it had been my former club from where I started my top-flight football career."

A mainstay in domestic football and a reliable presence between the sticks for Bangladesh from 2015 to 2022, Rana also played for Chittagong Abahani, Saif Sporting Club and Sheikh Russel Krira Chakra.

"I'm satisfied with my football career because what I am today is because of football, coming from a rural area," he said.

Among his fondest memories is the 1-1 draw against India during the 2019 FIFA World Cup Qualifiers in front of a roaring 90,000-strong crowd at Salt Lake Stadium. On the other end of the emotional spectrum lies the aggregate loss to Bhutan in the 2016 Asian Cup Qualifier play-offs -- a painful chapter where he wore the captain's armband.

Post-retirement, the 38-year-old is not planning to stray far from football. With an AFC 'B' diploma already in hand, he hopes to contribute as a goalkeeping coach, be it at club level or with the national age-group teams. He also intends to pursue an AFC Goalkeeping License.

"Playing top-flight football and representing the national team have been great honours," Rana said. "But I still have one regret -- we couldn't take the country's football back to the craze it once enjoyed. I would have been happier had we managed that."

Modric to leave Real after Club World Cup

AGENCIES

Luka Modric will leave Real Madrid after the Club World Cup, the Croatian midfielder said on Thursday as the club's most successful player and the 2018 Ballon d'Or winner prepares to end a trophy-laden stint in Spain. Modric, who arrived at the club in 2012, has played almost 600 games for Real and won nearly 30 trophies including a record six Champions League titles and four LaLiga trophies. His last match at the Bernabeu will be Real's final LaLiga game of the season against Real Sociedad on Saturday and the 39-year-old said he would sign off after their Club World Cup campaign which begins next month.

Tottenham rise in Europe while United sink further

AGENCIES

Brennan Johnson's scrappy first-half goal proved decisive as Tottenham Hotspur claimed the Europa League title with a tense 1-0 victory over Manchester United in Bilbao on Wednesday night, ending their 17-year wait for silverware and securing a Champions League return amid one of their worst domestic seasons in decades.

In a season where both giants languished near the Premier League drop zone, it was Spurs who salvaged pride and purpose, lifting their first European trophy since 1984.

Johnson's 42nd-minute effort, bundled in during a chaotic scramble with Luke Shaw, embodied the scruffy but spirited nature of the final.

United keeper Andre Onana, flat-footed and flailing, could only watch as the ball trickled in -- a fittingly clumsy climax to a match low on finesse but high on stakes.

The rest was sheer defensive defiance.

Tottenham manager Ange Postecoglou -- famed for his attacking 'Ange Ball' philosophy --



ditched flair for grit.

His side barely ventured forward in the second half but defended with steely discipline, repelling wave after wave of United pressure. Micky van de Ven's heroic goal-line clearance from a Rasmus Hojlund header and Guglielmo Vicario's reflex saves preserved their precious lead.

The final whistle sparked euphoria among Spurs supporters, who had endured

decades of heartbreak, including a Champions League final loss in 2019 and countless domestic collapses. As Son Heung-min hoisted the trophy in his ninth season at the club, tears of joy flowed for a fanbase long mocked for coming up short.

"We got it done," said match-winner Johnson. "People said we never would, but this is for every fan who's stuck with us through the pain."

Postecoglou, who faced mounting pressure with Spurs 17th in the Premier League after 21 defeats, earned redemption and vindication. Delivering on his pre-season vow to win silverware in his second year, he may now have forced a rethink on his future.

"I don't feel like I've completed the job yet," he said. "We've taken a big step, but there's more to come."

While Tottenham were jubilant, Manchester United descended further into despair. Defeated in four meetings with Spurs this season and without European football next year, coach Ruben Amorim's project is now in peril.

Bereft of identity and ideas, United's season ended with a whimper, not a roar.

For Spurs, this triumph offers more than a trophy. It brings belief, momentum, and a shot at the UEFA Super Cup this summer.

Whether Postecoglou stays or not, the narrative has changed. Tottenham are no longer the nearly men of English football -- they're champions of Europe once more.



Maisha Akhter Mim of BKSP continued her impressive form in the pool, securing two more gold medals in the Girls' U-15-17 category on the second day of the 37th National Age-Group Swimming Championships at the National Swimming Complex in Mirpur yesterday. With a determined performance, the promising swimmer cruised to victory in the 400m individual medley, clocking 06:07.80 minutes, and further extended her gold medal tally to five.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED