

Twin tons transmit new vitality

SPORTS REPORTER

Unbeaten centuries from Najmul Hossain Shanto and Mushfiquir Rahim on the opening day of the Galle Test yesterday brought welcome relief to Bangladesh cricket, who have been under scrutiny in recent months for both on- and off-field issues.

Bangladesh arrived in Sri Lanka following back-to-back T20I series defeats to Pakistan and the UAE. Across formats, success has been scarce in 2025. Their only wins so far came against Zimbabwe in a home Test -- following a shocking defeat in the opener -- and against the UAE in the opening T20I in Sharjah, although they went on to lose the series 2-1.

Instability within the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) and surrounding controversies have only deepened concerns, with public interest in the game beginning to wane.

So, while it was only the first day of the opening Test, Bangladesh's position at 292 for three -- courtesy of a 247-run unbroken stand between Shanto (136*) and Mushfiquir (105*) -- offered a rare moment of control and a breath of fresh air amid a trying period.

However, the day didn't start as brightly as it ended for the visitors.

Even after winning the crucial toss at the Galle International Stadium, which favours the batters most

SCORES IN BRIEF

BANGLADESH

292-3 in 90 overs (Shadman 14, Anamul 0, Mominul 29, Shanto 136 not out, Mushfiquir 105 not out; Tharindu 2-124, Asitha 1-51)

in the first two or three days, Bangladesh's top-order batters failed to make use of the conditions, and the first three wickets were thrown away in similar fashion as they reached for deliveries outside off stump only to be caught behind or in the slip cordon.

Opener Anamul Haque was dismissed for a duck in the fifth over by pacer Asitha Fernando, while debutant spinner Tharindu Ratnayake removed Shadman Islam (14) and Mominul Haque (29) in successive overs to reduce Bangladesh to 45-3. A familiar collapse seemed to be looming.

Instead, Shanto stepped up, anchoring the innings with poise. His measured stroke-play helped stabilise the innings and allowed Mushfiquir to grow into his knock. They guided Bangladesh to lunch at 90 for three, then added 92 and 110 runs in the following two sessions to close the day strongly.

After the day's play, senior campaigner Mushfiquir also hailed Shanto's efforts in building a memorable partnership, which is already the sixth-highest overall in their Test history, spanning almost 25 years.

"What I liked the most, it was a controlled innings so far from him (Shanto). He has previously scored a Test century in Kandy but it is also right up there. It's important to play controlled innings. He didn't give chances as well and I hope those who will bat next can learn from his batting," said Mushfiquir.

The centuries came at a crucial time for both Shanto and Mushfiquir, who had gone 20 and 13 innings, respectively, without reaching three figures -- with Shanto managing just two fifties and Mushfiquir none during that period.

Criticised for their recent form in the longest format, the duo responded when it mattered, and may have set the tone for a much-needed reset as a new World Test Championship cycle begins.

➤ Bangladesh Test skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto put an end to his century-less streak of 21 innings with his sixth Test ton against Sri Lanka in Galle yesterday. He did, however, manage two half-centuries during this period.

➤ This was Mushfiquir Rahim's fourth Test ton against Sri Lanka. He had no half-centuries in his last 13 innings and this is the first time he has reached the three-figure mark in 14 innings.

➤ With 12 Test tons to his name in 97 Tests, Mushfiquir is one shy of matching Mominul Haque, who has the highest number of tons for Bangladesh -- 13.

➤ Bangladesh batters have now pulled off 200-run stands 15 times in Tests, with the highest six instances coming against Sri Lanka.

➤ Shanto and Mushfiquir's unbroken 247-run stand is the second-highest fourth-wicket partnership in Galle, just behind the 259-run stand between Australia's Steve Smith and Alex Carey earlier this year.

➤ Bangladesh's highest fourth-wicket stand in the format also came against Sri Lanka in 2018 when Mushfiquir and Mominul Haque forged a 266-run stand in Mirpur.

Galle, Mushfiquir, and another statement

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Mushfiquir Rahim is playing only one format -- Test.

Perhaps one of the last of a dying breed of players to focus solely on Test cricket, Mushfiquir showed with his latest ton -- against Sri Lanka in Galle on Day 1 of Bangladesh's first Test yesterday -- that there is still that reservoir of patience left in the tank of a 38-year-old in the twilight of an enduring Test career.

Mushfiquir is three matches shy of hitting the century mark in Tests. But a lean patch saw him without a Test fifty for 13 straight knocks, with criticism surfacing whether a veteran, no matter how important, should be allowed just to reach a personal landmark despite poor form.

However, by the time Mushfiquir raised both hands after running a quick single to complete his 12th Test ton yesterday, he had answered all the doubts regarding his abilities. He did so at a ground which, in fact, made his name in Test cricket, with Galle being the venue of the first of his three Test double tons.

A bunch of single-digit scores and a 40 had preceded Mushfiquir's latest century. Even with the pressure mounting, he came through it with all the patience he had in store. There was no hurry to go for boundaries; rather, there was a lot of craftsmanship in another terrific day in Test cricket for both Bangladesh and Mushfiquir.



Skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto and Mushfiquir stitched an unbroken 247-run fourth-wicket stand. Shanto's 136*, Mushfiquir's 105*, and Bangladesh's 292 for three at close of Day 1 sees the Tigers barge ahead through the gloom of recent performances.

Is Galle a favourite hunting ground for Mushfiquir? One might say so.

Out of the six 200-plus stands Bangladesh have produced against Sri Lanka, Mushfiquir has been involved in four. With 1451 runs at an average of over 58, Sri Lanka may just be his favourite opponent.

Among foreign batters, Mushfiquir is the fifth in the list

of top run scorers at the Galle International Stadium. Only Younis Khan (497), Usman Khawaja (490), Joe Root (464), and Steve Smith (458) are ahead of Mushfiquir, who has 424 Test runs at the venue. Mushfiquir's innings still continues, and he can climb higher on that list.

None of the aforementioned batters, however, has an average of 141.33 at Galle that Mushfiquir possesses, and he has done so in just his third Test at the ground.

How did he approach his latest innings? With incredible calm.

Only five boundaries in that 105, Mushfiquir took 63 singles, eight doubles, and a couple of threes. He could not be lulled. The straight drive off Asitha Fernando early showed how closely he was watching the ball. He would even spend 69 deliveries at one phase without a boundary.

Then again, with a slog sweep off a Prabath Jayasuriya delivery, Mushfiquir reminded that he would not let spinners get on top.

When the new ball was taken, Mushfiquir, approaching a hundred, bailed out of a drive. A wry smile followed, indicating that he was not after something small.

At a venue in which Mushfiquir had indicated to go on to become a formidable Test cricketer with that double ton 12 years ago, Mushfiquir reminded that he, even at what could be termed as the beginning of the end, still has what it takes to be recognised as a batting mainstay of Bangladesh.

BKSP aims big with Alif, Sagor

SPORTS REPORTER

Archer Abdur Rahman Alif made it to the final for the first time at the senior level when the 19-year-old archer from Bangladesh Kriha Shikha Protistan (BKSP) advanced to the Recurve Individual final of Asia Cup Archery stage-2 beating beat Chinese Taipei's Pin-An Chen 6-4 in semifinal in Singapore yesterday.

Alif had before represented Bangladesh in the World Cups, Asian Archery Championships and Asian Grand Prix but never won an individual medal. He, however, was a silver triumphant member of Bangladesh recurve team in Asian Grand Prix twice in 2022 and 2024 respectively.

Alif, a 12 grader of BKSP, however, played the recurve individual final of Asian Archery U-21 Youth Championships in Chinese Taipei in September last year but he had to stay content with a silver medal suffering defeat at the hands of Li Cheng Huang.

Before beating 22nd-ranked Chen in the semifinal, the lad from Pabna also overcame the hurdles of China's 26th-ranked Alin in 6-2, 10th-ranked Malaysian Muhammad Syafiq Bushamin in 6-4 and 2nd-ranked Tai-Yen Liu of Chinese Taipei.

By confirming the final against Miyata Gakuto of China on Friday, Alif also confirmed his first-ever individual medal at the senior level as the lanky archer, who once climbed up 95th in world archery ranking, once lost his way in the national team before BKSP brought him back to the tract.

When Alif put his brilliant performance to make sure the final berth despite the absence of top archers like Hakim Ahmed Rubel and Ruman Sana who migrated to USA, the country's lone sports educational institute -- BKSP -- is mulling to take an ambitious project with Alif and Sagor Islam, who has already played 2024 Paris Olympic Games in his own merit.

In a view-exchange meeting with the high ups of 21 disciplines BKSP also trains up, BKSP's Director General Brigadier General Munirul Islam expressed his desire to take care of national archers Alif and Sagor upto 2028 with a target to win medal in Olympic Games.

"Among new disciplines, the successes are coming from archery and we want to gamble with two archers for 2028

Archers by providing them a long-term training if we get a few sponsors for them," said Islam. "I believe if we can provide them round the year training, it is not impossible to win a medal in Olympics because they have that standard."

The BKSP DG also urges the corporate houses like telecoms, banks, insurances and others to come forward to provide BKSP only Tk 26 lakh for next four years to realise the dream of winning a medal in Olympics.

"Both of them are going to sit in HSC exam and BKSP can't hold them after they pass the examination. So, we are seeking sponsors for both to keep them at the BKSP because we plan to provide them Tk 30k salary each along with some facilities and we need a total of Tk 26 lakh," said Islam adding that BKSP will bear all expenditure of accommodation, food, training, primary treatment, local and foreign coaches and transports.

Meanwhile, both Alif and Sagor have been in the national archery team under the guidance of German coach Martin Fredrick, who guided archers Ruman Sana and Sagor to make them qualify directly for the 2020 and 2024 Olympic Games respectively.



Gill hailed as blend of KOHLI AND ROHIT

REUTERS

Shubman Gill's style of captaincy blends the fire of Virat Kohli with the ice-cool composure of Rohit Sharma, but India's new Test skipper will carve out his own identity as he leads them in the upcoming Test series in England, Jos Buttler said on Tuesday.

India named Gill as their new Test captain in May, picking the 25-year-old top-order batter over pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah after Rohit quit the format.

India have long recognised Gill's leadership qualities, previously naming him vice-captain in both white-ball formats, while he also had two seasons as skipper of Indian Premier League (IPL) side Gujarat Titans.

"He's a really impressive player and an impressive young man..." Buttler, who played under Gill at Gujarat, said on the 'For the Love of Cricket' podcast.

"I feel like, on the field, he's got a bit of fight about him -- a bit of intensity, quite passionate. I think he'll be a mix of Kohli and Rohit.

"Kohli (was) that sort of really aggressive (character), really transformed the Indian team, in your face, up for the contest. Rohit a bit on the other side, a bit more laid back, very cool, calm, collected customer, but with that sort of fight.

"I feel like, from my time knowing Shubman so far, he'll be a bit in the middle. He's obviously learned from those two guys ... but he'll be very much his own man."

India play England in a five-match Test series starting on Friday at Headingley, and Buttler said Gill will be in the spotlight.

"Kohli is the king, Shubman is the prince -- that's the narrative that they spin out there, and I feel that he's the coming man," said Buttler, who stepped down as England's white-ball captain in February after their Champions Trophy exit.

"Stepping into that number four, it's big shoes, isn't it? Coming behind Virat, and Sachin Tendulkar before that as well. That's obviously a huge role."



Kylian Mbappe had a phenomenal season, scoring the most goals in debut season as a Real Madrid player (43 goals and five assists in all competitions), but the Frenchman and the club missed out on the top accolades (Champions League, LaLiga, and Copa del Rey). Real, however, won the UEFA Super Cup and the Intercontinental Cup, with Mbappe scoring in both the finals. Now, under new coach Xabi Alonso, Mbappe would be looking to end the campaign with a silverware by lifting the FIFA Club World Cup trophy, as Los Blancos take on Saudi side Al Hilal in their tournament opener at the Hard Rock Stadium on Wednesday night. Meanwhile, a revamped Manchester City, bolstered by new signings and coaching staff, will also begin their Club World Cup campaign against Moroccan club Wydad AC at the Lincoln Financial Field and will rely on an in-form Erling Haaland to lead the charge.

PHOTO: REAL MADRID/MANCHESTER CITY