New era for Bangladesh and Pakistan ahead of first Test

AFP- Bangladesh begin a two-Test series in Pakistan this week with their preparations severely hampered by the political turmoil that has wracked the country.

Unrest that led to the overthrow of prime minister Sheikh Hasina kept the team's foreign coaches indoors, strictly following advisories from their embassies, while mass protests stopped the team from assembling for practice sessions.

The make-up of the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is also up in the air, after president Nazmul Hassan fled the country due to his association with Hasina.

Cricket and politics go hand-in-hand in Bangladesh, but ace allrounder Shakib Al Hasan – a member of the now-dissolved parliament for Hasina's party – is being allowed to feature in the Pakistan series by the interim government.

"Because of the situation it was not possible to practice," spin bowling coach Mushtaq Ahmed told reporters.

The tourists got some reprieve after the Pakistan Cricket Board invited them to arrive four days early to make up for their lack of preparations.

A second-string Bangladesh team – with six players included from the national team – had already been playing practice games in Islamabad since August 10.

To add to Bangladesh's problems, in-form opener Mahmudul Hasan Joy has been ruled out of the first Test with a groin strain, but senior batter Mushfiqur Rahim is expected to recover in time from a finger injury.

– No-win record –

Bangladesh will be hoping hope to overturn their no-win record against Pakistan, having lost 12 of the 13 Tests, with just one draw.

The two-match Test series is part of the World Test Championship's third cycle with Pakistan sixth in the current nine-team table and Bangladesh eighth.

The second Test – both matches moved to Rawalpindi because of construction work at Karachi stadium – will be played from August 30.

Following a 3-0 rout in Australia earlier this year, Pakistan brought in former Aussie paceman Jason Gillespie as Test coach, while Adelaide groundsman Damien Hough was hired to improve the standard of pitches.

Having released their only spinner, Abrar Ahmed, Pakistan will enter the Test with an all-pace attack – a ploy they last used five years ago against Sri Lanka at the same venue.

Bangladesh, however, will rely on spin with Shakib (237 wickets), Taijul Islam (195), and Mehidy Hasan Miraz (164) all included.

Pakistan captain Shan Masood refused to accept the Bangladesh team is under-prepared.

"You expect all international Test sides to come into a series well prepared and trying to play their best cricket," he told AFP.

"Bangladesh is a side that has quality players in all departments and we highly respect the challenges they bring as a side to us."

Masood also hopes Pakistan will show improvement under the new coach.

"We are excited to see how they (coaches) help us to be better

people, better cricketers and – most importantly – be among the top teams in the world.”

Teams (from):

Pakistan: Shan Masood (captain), Saud Shakeel, Abdullah Shafique, Babar Azam, Khurram Shahzad, Mir Hamza, Mohammad Ali, Muhammad Hurraira, Mohammad Rizwan, Naseem Shah, Saim Ayub, Agha Salman, Sarfaraz Ahmed, Shaheen Shah Afridi

Bangladesh: Najmul Hossain Shanto (captain), Zakir Hasan, Shadman Islam, Mominul Haque, Mushfiqur Rahim, Shakib Al Hasan, Litton Das, Mehidy Hasan Miraz, Taijul Islam, Nayeem Hasan, Nahid Rana, Shoriful Islam, Hasan Mahmud, Khaled Ahmed

Umpires: Richard Kettleborough (ENG) and Adrian Holdstock (RSA)

Tv umpire: Michael Gough (ENG)

Match referee: Ranjan Madugalle (SRI)

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