

Hoping for a smile

SPORTS REPORTER



Beleaguered Bangladesh will take on South Africa at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today.

After the humiliating 199-run defeat at the hands of an under-strength India, it's going to be yet another uphill task for Khaled Mahmud's men.

The main objective for Bangladesh will be to try and overcome the batting blues irrespective of losing or winning the match.

The selectors have made three changes to the team that played on Friday.

Opener Mehrez Hossain and middle-order batsmen Tushar Imran are replaced by Javed Omar and Habibul Bashar. Besides, right-arm seamer Tareq Aziz Khan will operate in place of Manjurul Islam.

Young Mohammad Ashraf will continue to open the innings.

But as far history is concerned, South Africa will remain favourites.

The Proteas have enjoyed big wins over Bangladesh. In the past four meetings the margins of victory were

168 runs, 10 wickets, seven wickets and 10 wickets respectively.

The last time they met was during the World Cup and it lasted only 47.1 overs.

Bangladesh batted first and were shot out for 108 in 35.1 overs and in reply, the home side took only 12 overs to plunder 109 for no loss.

With team morale at an absolute low, neither the coach or the captain had the confidence to say that things could improve at the start of a new year in the Bangla calendar.

"We are making fundamental mistakes again and again. The batsmen don't have the proper footwork nor stance. Neither do they can grip the bat properly. That's why they are not doing well."

"The South Africans on the other hand are very professional so it's very easy for them to exploit the weaknesses of their opponents," said Bangladesh coach Sarwar Imran during the team's nets at the Bangabandhu National Stadium in the morning.

He added that it was not possible to rectify the problems overnight since it required time and energy.

"However, our primary target is to play 50 overs tomorrow without losing

any wickets in the first 15 overs. If that happens we might score 220 to 230," he added.

He also hoped that his spinners would be able to take full advantage of the South Africans inability to deal with a turning ball.

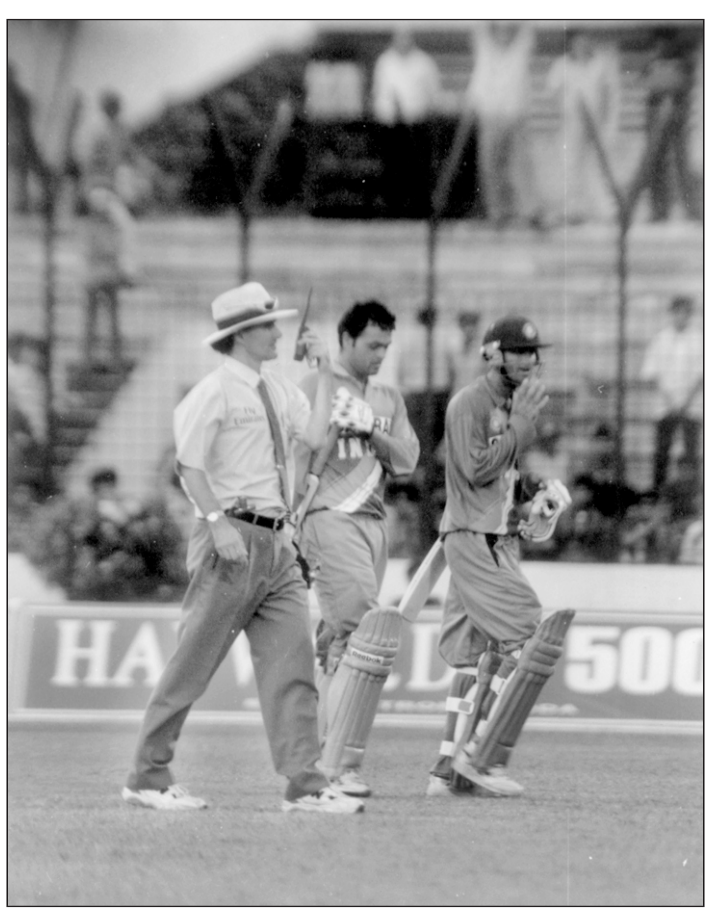
Mahmud had very little to add to his coach's comments.

"We have spent more time batting in the nets in the last two days. But realistically it is impossible to improve in just two days. All I have tried to do maintain the players' spirits."

He still was bold enough to say that his South African counterpart would be under pressure in his second match in the helm.

SQUADS
BANGLADESH: Khaled Mahmud (captain), Javed Omar, Mohammad Ashraf, Habibul Bashar, Alok Kapali, Akram Khan, Sanwar Hossain, Khaled Masud, Mohammad Rafique, Tapas Baishya and Tareq Aziz Khan.

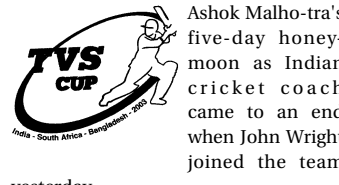
SOUTH AFRICA (from): Graeme Smith (captain), Paul Adams, Mark Boucher, Allan Dawson, Boeta Dippenaar, Herschelle Gibbs, Andrew Hall, Neil McKenzie, Makhaya Ntini, Robin Peterson, Shaun Pollock, Jacques Rudolph and Charl Willoughby.



LET'S GET SOME DRINKS DOWN HERE! Charismatic umpire Billy Bowden (L) talks on his walkie-talkie after the end of the Indian innings yesterday.

SERIES SNIPPETS

HASAN MASOOD



Wright, whose contract has been extended recently following India's brilliant performance in the World Cup, went on leave to attend his father's funeral.

Though his reign was short-lived and may be a record of sorts, Malhotra did have the pleasure of watching the World Cup runners-up dismantle hosts Bangladesh.

No sooner had the former New Zealand opener arrived it was business as usual. He supervised the team's final preparation at the big bowl.

ATWO-MATCH HATRICK
Tapas Baishya might become the first Bangladesh bowler to complete a hat-trick in one-day international cricket if he gets a wicket with his first ball against South Africa today.

The right-arm seamer from Sylhet, grabbed two successive wickets in his last two balls in the opening match of the TVS Cup against India on Friday.

He bowled Harbhajan Singh with the fifth delivery of his last over and then castled Zaheer Khan for a duck.

So, if he achieves the milestone it will be unique since it was spread over two matches. Best of luck Tapas!

BIG MATCH YET POOR CROWD

Imagine India and South Africa were playing in Dhaka and the crowd was far below expectation. The number was half compared to the figure that watched Bangladesh being crushed by India on the opening day of the tournament.

According to Khandker Jamil-uddin, the chairman of BCB's ticket committee, Taka 10 lakh was earned from the Bangladesh-India match.

Talking to the Daily Star Sport, Jamil said that only 11 thousand tickets were sold.

Many spectators complained they were not willing to spend more money to watch yesterday's game.

A Western Gallery ticket for the Bangladesh-India match cost Taka 40 while the same ticket for the India-South Africa was ten taka more.

NOT A PERFECT DAY
Things did not go according to plan for Graeme Smith.

The new South African skipper began by losing the toss then he watched the Indians take his bowlers apart and to make

matters worse ICC match referee Clive Lloyd later fined him 20 per cent and his new-look team 10 per cent for their slow overrate.

The Proteas were penalised for failing to finish in the schedule three-and-a-half hours.

The new law has come into effect after ICC revived its policy on slow over rates last month.

Under the ruling, "teams will still have three-and-a-half hours plus allowances given by the match referee to bowl 50 overs and each member of the bowling team will be fined five per cent of his match fee per lost over. However, under the amended playing conditions, penalties will be doubled for the captain of the bowling side."

"The penalty of reducing the overs for a team batting second that failed to complete its overs in the allotted time has been removed, the law further stated."

NINTI CENTURY
South African speedster Makhaya Ntini finally claimed his 100th one-day international wicket when he had young opener Gautam Gambhir caught behind for 18.

The bustling right-arm quick, who had been out of the game following a lengthy ban, achieved the landmark in his 69th appearance.



CLASS TELLS: Indian skipper Saurav Ganguly plays a delicate shot opening the face of the bat at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Sultan in trouble again

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

The wish of Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president SA Sultan to hold the elections of the federation on April 26 suffered another twist yesterday when a Division Bench of the High Court issued a Rule Nisi questioning the legality of the announcement of the date.

The High Court Bench comprising Justice Abdur Rashid and Justice Siddiqui Rahman issued the Rule on Saturday following a petition by BFF executive committee member Rezaul Kabir and also served a show cause on the BFF acting general secretary Sirajul Islam and the Election Commission of the National Sports Council (NSC).

Rezaul in a Writ Petition challenged a BFF circular (Memo No. 252 (128)/BFF-Council/03) issued by the BFF acting general secretary on March 25 inviting the nomination of delegates/councilors. He also challenged

the circular of the Election Commissioner on April 4 declaring the election schedule and the final list of councilors.

Sultan had called an EGM (Extraordinary General Meeting) on April 26. The election of the BFF was also scheduled on the same day in line with the prescription of Asian Football Confederation (AFC) general secretary Peter Vellappan.

The AFC chief had earlier threatened that any election that didn't come after an EGM would be declared null and void following Sultan's plans of an election without the EGM. Sultan however got a reprieve after he agreed to go Vellappan's way.

However, the latest complication arose after he invited new councilors to join the EGM prompting the aggrieved former councilors to move to the court.

Faced with the present situation, Sultan tried to put up a brave face yesterday.

"I have not yet received any court order. Once I get it we will fix our next course of action. As far as I'm concerned

the 26 April election is still on," he said to reporters last night.

The game's governing body FIFA have set a deadline for the BFF to hold their election by the end of this month.

BACKDATED BFF
Meanwhile, the BFF's lack of knowledge and diplomacy was once again painfully exposed when three Bangladeshi players were barred from playing in an Olympic-qualifying match against Myanmar on Saturday.

The Bangladesh Under-23 team lost the away match 0-3 but more importantly midfielders Arman, Arif Khan Joy and central defender Rajani Kanta Barman were not allowed to take part in that game.

The BFF sent the three national stalwarts under the impression that three over-aged players were permitted to play in the qualifying stages.

But interestingly the BFF officials did not even bother to consult the Olympic football bye-laws (Article 24-2) that clearly state that a maximum of three players aged over 23 would be allowed to play 'in the final round of the competition'.



TRINIDAD RULES! West Indies captain Brian Lara (R) is being congratulated by his Trinidad mate Daren Ganga after reaching his 19th Test hundred.

MSC on front foot

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

A brilliant century from Ehsanul Haque helped title aspirants Mohammedan Sporting Club pile up a commanding first innings total against City Club in one of the two GrameenPhone Premier Division Super League matches at the BKSP ground in Savary yesterday.

On the opening day of the four-day match, Ehsanul, the discarded Bangladesh right-handed batsman, hammered 120 as Mohammedan, electing to bat, mustered 345 before being all out in 87 overs.

City Club could bat for only one over before the stumps were drawn for the day. At that stage they were two without loss.

Ehsanul batted for four-and-a-half

hours and struck 14 boundaries in his 182-ball knock.

Ehsanul apart, middle-order Naimur Rahman scored 66 followed by opener Anwar Hossain and Nafees Iqbal who added 41 and 35 runs respectively.

Away at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium, Abahani off-spinner Ali Arman took seven wickets to bundle out Brothers Union Club for 212 in 90.2 overs after they were put into bat.

Arman conceded 62 runs in his miserly 30.2 overs. Left-arm spinner Suja Erfan took two wickets for 81 runs.

For Brothers, opener Shahriar Hossain topscored with 64 while Halim Shah added 55.

In their reply, Abahani were also dealt an early blow when they lost Opener Hannan Sarkar for nought. By close, they were four for 1 in 2 overs.

SCOREBOARD
Scorecards on the first day of the two GrameenPhone Premier Division Super League matches played at different

venues yesterday:

Mohammedan SC v City Club
Venue: BKSP

MOHAMMEDAN SC: First innings				
Anwar cand b Raza	41			
Nafees lbw b Saifullah	35			
Aftab c Rajin b Saifullah	6			
Ehsanul lbw b Alamgir	120			
Minhazul b Mashrafee	33			
Naimur c M'zaman b Alamgir	66			
Fahim c Mashrafee b Raza	16			
Enamul not out	21			
S Mahmud lbw b Alamgir	1			
Hasibul b Mashrafee	0			
Munir b Alamgir	0			
Extras: (b-1, lb-4, w-1)	6			
Total: (All out in 87 overs)	345			
Fall of wickets: 1-70, 2-70, 3-137, 4-245, 5-272, 6-298, 7-330, 8-336, 9-338				

Bowler				
Alamgir	15	1	67	4
Mashrafee	17	3	60	2
Hasan Raza	13	3	62	2
Saifullah	18	1	73	2
Jamaluddin	21	2	66	0

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Zim get green light

Cricket

AFP, Harare

Zimbabwe's scheduled 10-week cricket tour of England and Ireland has been given the green light.

After weeks of anxious waiting for a decision by the country's Sports and Recreation Commission, Zimbabwe Cricket Union (ZCU) chairman Peter Chingoka was telephoned with approval Friday night by the Commission chairman Anthony Mandiwanza.

Chingoka would not confirm the go-ahead until he received it in writing, but a reliable source said: "I can tell you that approval for the tour has been received but it won't be released officially until the Sports Commission letter arrives."

Neither Chingoka nor ZCU chief executive Vincent Hogg were available

for comment Saturday.

The ZCU have spent anxious weeks awaiting the Sports Commission's decision because it was feared that the government of Robert Mugabe might intervene to stop the tour in response to the boycott of Harare during the recent cricket World Cup by the England players, who claimed it was not safe to play here.

There has been widespread speculation in Zimbabwe that the government might decide on a tit-for-tat retaliation. But Mandiwanza told AFP: "We have a clear mandate at the Commission in decision making. And we deal only with sport, not politics."

He added that a delay in getting back to the ZCU was because he had been away and for no other reason.

And he emphasised there had been no input by any government ministry.

Kiwis coming to Sri Lanka

AFP, Colombo

New Zealand's cricket tour of Sri Lanka is set to go ahead, the cricket board here said Saturday after the side said it would monitor the deadly SARS outbreak in Asia before committing to the trip.

The team was due in Colombo early Tuesday, the Sri Lankan Cricket Board said.

The New Zealanders had said they would monitor the rapidly spreading Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), which has killed more than 200 people worldwide, before deciding on the tour. No SARS cases have been reported in Sri Lanka.

New Zealand's cricketers have always entertained reservations about touring Sri Lanka due to the Indian ocean island's long-running separatist armed conflict.

The Kiwis abandoned their 1987 tour after the Tamil Tigers carried out a bomb attack on the busy central bus terminal in Colombo.

Malhotra extols fitness mantra

AFP, Dhaka

India's stand-in coach Ashok Malhotra said Sunday the cricket team was fitter than ever and he praised physical trainer Adrian Le Roux for the transformation of their fitness levels.

"Our cricket team is really very, very fit," Malhotra said. "It is not easy playing in the hot and humid conditions here, but it doesn't seem to affect the players at all."

A former India player and a national selector until last year, Malhotra said he could see the difference in the players' attitude towards fitness as well as towards the game.

India have the services of South African le Roux for about a year now and Malhotra said the team was instilled with a sense of purpose with the fitness mantra.

"The clinical performance against Bangladesh on Friday showed our determination. To give nothing away even in a not-so-important match is no mean achievement."

Ganga, Lara lead WI fightback

Cricket

AFP, Georgetown

Centuries by West Indian batsmen Brian Lara and Daren Ganga turned the heat back on to Australia as the first Caribbean cricket Test took a decided turn at the Bourda Ground here on Saturday.

Faced with a huge 252-run first innings deficit, the West Indies fought their way back into the contest with master batsman Lara and his Trinidadian 'apprentice' Ganga turning the tide with a 185-run third-wicket partnership to give the home side an outside hope of victory with two days to play.

At the close of the third day, the West Indies were 381 for five with first-innings centurion Shivnarine Chanderpaul unbeaten on 26 and Vasbert Drakes on 14 to hold a 129-run lead over the Australians.

Lara, who plundered three centuries off the Australian bowlers in the last 1999 Caribbean series, looked headed for another huge score on Saturday.

Lara, who holds the world record Test score of 375 against England, had scored 277, 218 and 182 in the past against Australia.

Lara, who was recalled to the captaincy for the series after a three-year break, had been booed by some Guyanese fans loyal to sacked skipper Carl Hooper as he walked to the wicket.

But the crowd was soon eating out of his hand as the 33-year-old batting artist set to the Australian attack for his 19th Test hundred.

With his second 50 coming off 56 balls and on 110, Lara was out in extraordinary circumstances just over an hour before stumps.

He attempted a sweep shot off leg-spinner Brad Hogg, only to swing his bat in the follow-through and clip the top of the balls to be out hit wicket.

Lara batted for just over three hours in his 157-ball knock containing 20 fours.

It was the wicket the Australians were sweating on and 15 minutes before stumps they removed Ganga, when he hauled out to Brett Lee at mid-wicket off Darren Lehmann for 113 - his first Test century.

Lara was given splendid support by 24-year-old Ganga, who was relieved to vindicate the faith of Lara and the selectors with his maiden Test century in 311 minutes with 19 fours and a six off Hogg.

Australia's task of restricting the West Indies' second-innings total was not aided by a flood of no-balls for overstepping.

The Australian bowlers had conceded a total of 22 no-balls, 10 of them to fast bowler Brett Lee and even the leg-spinners, Stuart MacGill (3) and Hogg (2) over-stepped the crease.

Earlier, Steve Waugh needed six stitches between his index and middle fingers on his left hand in attempting to stop a hot drive by exciting young opener Devon Smith.

The Australian captain returned to the field after lunch and even bowled a couple of overs.

Smith, the 21-year-old Test debutant from Grenada, smashed

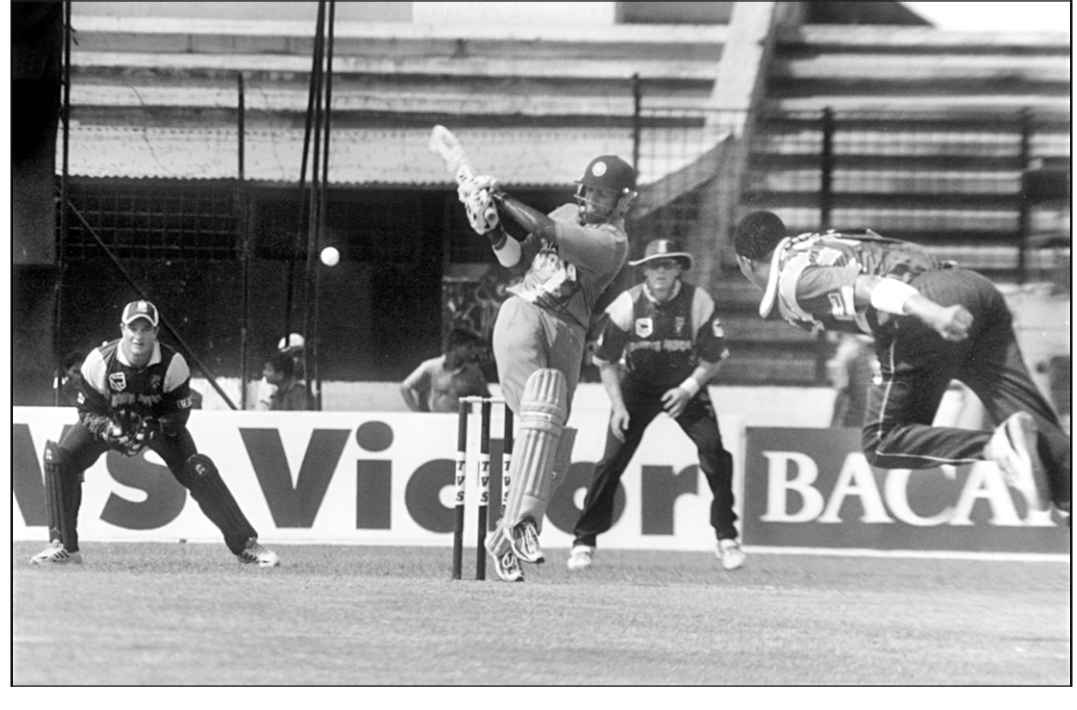
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INDIA-S AFRICA SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard of the TVS Cup tri-nation tournament match between India and South Africa at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday:

INDIA:					
Gautam Gambhir c M Boucher b M Ntini	18	38	30	3	0
Virender Sehwag c J Rudolph b A Dawson	37	81	44	6	0
Saurav Ganguly c N McKenzie b A Dawson	75	117	80	7	2
Mohammad Kaif not out	95	143	103	7	3
Yuvraj Singh run out (H Gibbs/A Dawson)	11	17	12	1	0
Dinesh Mongia not out	55	50	38	6	0
Extras: (lb-3, w-8, nb-5)	16				
Total: (For 4 wickets in 50 overs)	307				
Did not bat: Parthiv Patel, Ajit Agarkar, Harbhajan Singh, Zaheer Khan, Amit Mishra					
Fall of wickets: 1-45 (Gambhir), 2-89 (Sehwag), 3-175 (Ganguly), 4-197 (Yuvraj)					
Bowler					
Charl Willoughby	10	0	77	0	
Makhaya Ntini	10	0	51	1	
Allan Dawson	10	2	46	2	
Robin Peterson	8	0	56	0	
Shaun Pollock	9	0	54	0	
Graeme Smith	3	0	20	0	
SOUTH AFRICA					
Graeme Smith b A Agarkar	1	11	6	0	0
Herschelle Gibbs c and b H Singh	26	63	42	4	0
Jacques Rudolph c V Sehwag b A Agarkar	4	15	10	1	0
Boeta Dippenaar c Y Singh b S Ganguly	22	41	26	2	0
Neil McKenzie c P Patel b A Mishra	12	36	33	0	0

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Indian opener Gautam Gambhir is about to be caught by South African wicketkeeper Mark Boucher (L) off Makhaya Ntini following a mistimed pull at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR