



Chief selector Faruque Ahmed (C) answers questions at a press briefing while announcing the Bangladesh squad for the first three one-dayers against Zimbabwe at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Another lesson for Ashraful

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Ace batsman Mohammad Ashraful was dropped for the first three one-day internationals of the five-match home series against Zimbabwe as the national selectors stuck to their old policy of 'bringing back his form by keeping him outside the mainstream'.

Chief selector Faruque Ahmed announced a 13-member national squad besides two separate teams for warm-up and Twenty20 matches yesterday at a press conference leaving out Ashraful and Rajin Saleh from the squad that toured India for the recently concluded ICC Champions Trophy.

The BCB selection panel's new slogan 'talent is not good enough, we need performers in the team' was reflected in their decision in replacing Ashraful with frequently in

and out middle-order batsman Tushar Imran.

In the face of a volley of questions about Ashraful's exclusion, selectors said that they wanted to give the exciting right-hander a clear message that his place in the squad is not cemented. However they have only left him so that he works on getting back his form.

"We all know he is a rare breed of talent and has proved his match-winning ability in the past. He has been going through a long bad-patch that's why we thought that it would be better for him to play in less pressure games for getting good knocks," explained Faruque.

Coach Dav Whatmore was absent due to illness but it was learned that the selectors obliged to his wish on the matter.

"We had a very simple policy behind selection this time and that was to make a team on basis of performance. I once again want to mention that Ashraful is a match

winner but we can't overlook the consistency issue. We have also won matches in recent times without his contribution. He smashed a hundred in the domestic match recently but we want to see his bat speaking consistently," he continued.

Being dropped is nothing new for the 22-year-old Dhaka batsman as he had been ignored from playing eleven in the past often for his poor showing. The last time it happened was during the last match of the ICC Champions Trophy against Zimbabwe. He was twice excluded from the squad previously, in Bangladesh's lone South Africa tour and England's first visit to Bangladesh in October 2003.

This omission raised questions about his participating in next year's World Cup because many thought it was funny to sideline a batsman in a comparatively easy home series and then again picked up for the top tournament of the world.

"There is hardly any chance to see

Ashraful not going to the World Cup. We hope he will get back his form in the next two games of the National Cricket League and get in contention for the remaining two games as well as the Scotland series," hoped the former national skipper.

When he was asked what would happen if Ashraful failed to shine in the next two domestic matches, Faruque responded with a mysterious smile, perhaps meaning that they would get enough excuses to bring back the batsman.

Many believed that it were the selectors who have made Ashraful confused by rotating his batting position often and before the Champions Trophy, the selectors had publicly announced that they would give him 'enough time' to settle as an opener. But their patience ran out after just two games.

When asked whether the team management including coach Whatmore should also be held

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Rain delay at Wanderers

REUTERS, Johannesburg

The first one-day international between South Africa and India here on Sunday was unable to get underway on time.

Light rain began falling over the Wanderers ground half-an-hour before the scheduled start and the toss was delayed.

Aktel goes cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) formally announced Aktel yesterday as sponsor of the two coming home series against Zimbabwe and Scotland.

Both the series would be named the "Aktel Series 2006".

The cellular operator house joined the prestigious sponsorship list of BCB for the first time offering a handsome amount of Tk 1.21 crore, which also includes the man-of-the-match and man of the series awards.

"Aktel emerged as the highest bidder among three competitors for the title sponsor. The other two companies have requested us not to mention their names and amount," informed Syed Farhad Ahmed, vice-president of BCB's Media Committee, at a press conference yesterday at a local hotel.

It was learned that GrameenPhone, who was the sponsor of the last home series against Australia for two Tests and three one-day internationals, was the nearest contender.

For seven ODIs against Zimbabwe who have decided not to play Test cricket till November 2007 – and two against ICC associate members Scotland – the offer seems really big as the series against world champions Australia had cost GrameenPhone Tk 65 lakh but Rajaduray Selvaduray, the chief financial officer of the sponsors, justified their offer.

"Cricket is by far the most popular game in the country and has become a national pride. The recent TV deal just reflects how the game has gained importance commercially," said Rajaduray.

Baboo picks his squad for Asiad

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) yesterday announced a 23-member squad including 19 players for the Asian Games to be held in Doha next month.

The Games begin on December 1 but the footballers will leave Dhaka on November 25 for the Qatar capital for their opening group match against South Korea on November 28.

Drawn in a strong group, Bangladesh will play Bahrain on December 2 and Vietnam on December 5.

The teams are allowed to carry 20 footballers but Mehdi Hassan Ujjal's trip remains uncertain after he missed the training camp for one week.

The BFF show-caused the Abahani attacking midfielder for his absence and came to know that he had to attend his father due to his illness.

"We will discuss the issue tomorrow and decide whether to include him or not. If we are not satisfied we will not take him and

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Rafique routs Barisal

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Veteran all-rounder Mohammad Rafique warmed up well for the upcoming series against Zimbabwe when he guided Dhaka to a massive 248-run win against Barisal with a four-wicket haul on the final day of their four-day match in the Ispahani Mirzapore 8th National Cricket League yesterday.

Dhaka joined Rajshahi on top of the table with one victory and a draw at the end of the second round.

Barisal's nightwatchman Ali Arman was the first wicket to fall on the day at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium when he edged to the slips off Tigers fast bowler Shahadat Hossain for 24. The tall paceman, who suffered an ankle injury while bowling on the second day, looked to be fit for the Zimbabwe series and was named in the 13-man squad.

Arman added 68 runs with his captain Shahriar Nafees who resumed on overnight 44.

Nafees fell soon when he was caught by Nadif Chowdhury off Rafique for 56, with his team's score on 104. The national vice-captain struck eight boundaries.

Seamer Mohammad Sharif continued his good form removing middle-order Humayun Kabir for four and by then, Barisal were all but out of the battle.

Wicketkeeper Mohammad Shaheen was next to go when Rafique trapped him lbw for just five and soon, Imran Ahmed fell to Mohammad Ashraful for 24.

Ashraful's leg-spin also claimed the scalp of Ishraq Sonnet (6), caught by Sharif as Barisal were staring at a huge defeat of a 300-plus margin.

But number eight Arafat Salahuddin kept Dhaka waited a little longer when he stuck around with tail-ender Sajidul Islam for more than an hour. Arafat, who hit eleven boundaries in his 61 off 80

balls, had a 61-run ninth wicket stand with Sajidul (12 not out). Rafique took the final wicket as middle-order batsman Nasiruddin Faruque could not bat because of poor health.

Rafique ended with 4-49 while Ashraful, man-of-the-match for his first innings ton, took two wickets. Seamers Mahbubul Alam, Sharif and Shahadat Hossain took one each.

Dhaka travel to Chittagong for their third round encounter while Rajshahi face Sylhet in a home game on November 21. Barisal take on Khulna at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium on the same day.

SCORES IN BRIEF

DHAKA: 370 and 265-6 dec. BARISAL: First Innings: 175 and second innings: 212 all out in 75.3 overs (Salahuddin 61, Nafees 56, Imran 24; Rafique 4-49, Ashraful 2-59)

Result: Dhaka won by 248 runs. Man-of-the-match: Mohammad Ashraful (Dhaka).



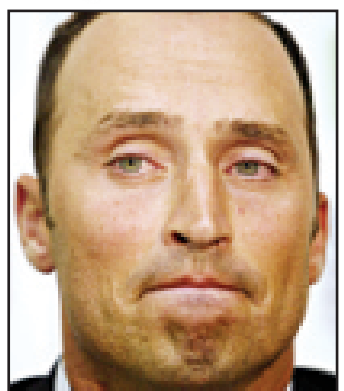
Bangladesh Cricket Board's CEO Mahamudur Rahman (R) shakes hands with Aktel's chief financial officer Rajaduray Selvaduray after an agreement signing ceremony at the Sheraton Hotel yesterday. Aktel, a leading cellular operator in the country, won the title sponsorship rights for Bangladesh's home series against Zimbabwe later this month.

PHOTO: STAR



Did U Know?

The first reference to a monetary prize in a horse race was offered by King Richard I of England in 1195.



Nasser Hussain

(Former England cricket captain) "The McGrath-Warne axis is the greatest bowling partnership of all time and although still formidable, there are signs of decline there too. England will feel that if they can get through McGrath's new-ball spell and the occasional wonderful spell from Warne, there will be runs to be had elsewhere."

WI seize Pak momentum

Cricket

AFP, Multan

Imran Farhat, Yousuf Khan and Mohammad Yousuf all hit half-centuries before the West Indies halted Pakistan's spree late on the first day of the second Test at Multan Stadium on Sunday.

In-form Yousuf miscued a drive off spinner Chris Gayle and was caught by Brian Lara for 56 to leave Pakistan on 263-4 at stumps. Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq was unbeaten on 31, with Shoaib Malik not out on four.

The home team, one up in the series, were looking set for a big first innings score after opener Imran Farhat (74) and Yousuf joined Yousuf in the runs.

With just three overs to go before stumps, Yousuf's dismissal brought some consolation for the tourists' bowlers who struggled on a flat pitch after Pakistan won the toss and decided to bat.

West Indian captain Lara was

happy with his bowlers' performance.

"I am very much satisfied with the bowlers' work. They bowled in the right area on a pitch which is made for batting. Had we taken some other chances we would have been in a better position," said Lara.

Yousuf was once again lucky as he was dropped on 45 by Daren Ganga off a miscued drive to fast bowler Jerome Taylor. Ganga dropped Yousuf off the same bowler on 43 in the first Test when the batsman went on to make 192.

Yousuf capitalised on the crucial miss by reaching his 26th half-century in the next over which included three fours and a six off left-arm spinner Dave Mohammed, but fell six runs later.

He added an invaluable 87 runs for the third wicket with Yousuf.

Taylor, who finished with 2-61, had his tail up after he dismissed Yousuf soon after tea. Yousuf failed to get an upish shot over the gully and was caught by Runako Morton.

Yousuf and Yousuf built on a sound start of 83 by Farhat and Mohammad Hafeez (36).

Taylor, who picked 4-115 in the first Test, provided the breakthrough when he forced an edge off Hafeez's bat to wicketkeeper Denesh Ramdin.

Pakistan reached 109-1 at lunch with Farhat notching up his ninth half-century.

Heavy rain delayed the resumption of play after lunch by 12 minutes but once players returned to the middle the tourists removed Farhat for 74.

Farhat, who hit ten boundaries during his 177-minute knock, edged Dwayne Bravo to slip where Lara held a regulation catch.

Yousuf provided able support to Farhat and reached his 16th Test half-century with his sixth boundary off Taylor.

Pakistan remained unchanged from their first Test line-up which they won by nine wickets in Lahore last week.

But the tourists surprisingly dropped their out-of-form vice captain Ramnaresh Sarwan, who

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THANK YOU: West Indies captain Brian Lara (R) holds on to a sharp catch in the second slip as Pakistan left-handed opener Imran Farhan (2nd from L) looks back on the opening day of the second Test at Multan yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Eng leave Adelaide happy

Cricket

AFP, Adelaide

England completed their final warm-up match ahead of Thursday's eagerly awaited Ashes Test opener against Australia by drawing with South Australia at the Adelaide Oval on Sunday.

South Australia were 164 for two in their second innings, trailing England by four runs, when the teams agreed to an early end to the three-day match.

England were bowled out for 415 before lunch, but gained little else from the middle and final sessions, as the South Australians batted out the remaining time for the loss of just two wickets.

Opener Daniel Harris finished unbeaten on 71 and Callum Ferguson was seven not out.

Ian Bell, whose fighting 132 Saturday readied him for batting at No.3 at the Gabba in Brisbane, said England had dealt with adversity

since winning the Ashes last year, having lost Michael Vaughan, Simon Jones and Marcus Trescothick to injury and illness.

"We've been through things like this before, (this year in India we lost three or four players to injury before the first Test match," Bell told reporters.

"But the great thing about this squad we do have is when things do get tough we stick together and we seem to get better performances out of each other.

"This is what has happened so far, especially in the past two warm-up games, we've come out and played some good cricket."

Matthew Elliott (55) made his first first-class half-century of the season, before he was out to left-arm spinner Monty Panesar, who is vying with Ashley Giles to play in the first Test.

Panesar took 1-34, while part-timer Kevin Pietersen (1-24) claimed a wicket when Cameron Borgas (27) hit to deep mid-wicket.

England improved their performance in each match against New

South Wales and South Australia after being thrashed by the Prime Minister's XI in a one-dayer.

The tourists can also take heart from some encouraging individual efforts into the first Test.

All six Test batsmen have scored at least one half-century from a maximum three innings, while Kevin Pietersen and Ian Bell posted centuries against New South Wales and South Australia respectively.

Aside from Harmison, who bowled 25 overs against New South Wales but sat out the Adelaide game with a side strain, all of the bowlers have sent down plenty of overs.

England got in 124.1 overs of batting practice ahead of the opening Test before they were dismissed holding an innings lead of 168 runs.

Skipper Andrew Flintoff made 47 and fast bowler Sajid Mahmood 41 off 46 balls.

Flintoff was bowled by leg-spinner Cullen Bailey attempting a big hit, while Mahmood clubbed

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Can KP do it again?

Cricket

AFP, London

Kevin Pietersen helped England win one Ashes series; now the question facing him and the rest of Andrew Flintoff's side is can they do it again?

Pietersen already had an important role to play in England's batting line-up before the Australia tour started but, with opener Marcus Trescothick having returned home with a recurrence of a stress-related illness, the expectations on the top order shot-maker will increase.

That is unlikely to be a problem for Pietersen who doesn't suffer from the diffidence that has hampered the careers of many England cricketers.

The Hampshire batsman is well aware of his own talents and worth. He has a directness and brashness that plenty find hard to take, never mind the diamond-earring and now discarded 'skunk' hairstyle.

And that's just in England. Indeed, there are many who contend that the 26-year-old is playing for the wrong country. Born in South Africa but qualified

for England through an English mother, Pietersen quit his homeland in protest at being dropped from the Natal side because, he said, of a racial quota system.

"To me, every single person in this world needs to be treated exactly the same and that should have included me, as a promising 20-year-old cricketer," Pietersen wrote in his autobiography.

Sportsmen are renowned for their tunnel vision but there were those in South Africa and beyond who were annoyed by Pietersen's

apparent refusal to understand why, even if misguided, a quota system had been introduced.

Soon afterwards Pietersen came to England where he joined Nottinghamshire for three eventful seasons before moving to Hampshire, captained by Australia leg-spinner Shane Warne, at the start of the 2005 campaign.

By then he'd already scored a century in a one-day international against South Africa in Bloemfontein

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What to WATCH

TEN Sports

Pakistan v West Indies
Second Test, Day 2
Live at 10:30 am

ESPN

Sportscenter India
Sports News
Live at 8:30 pm