

# A different mood

**Cricket**

**SPORTS REPORTER**

When cricketers return from a long tour, fatigue is usually written on their faces. But that was not the case with the Tigers who arrived back in Dhaka in a chirpy mood yesterday after their eight-week mission in England.

Even the one and a half-hour's flight delay due to inclement weather could not dampen their spirit and it was not difficult to understand why.

"In the past, we have returned home with not too many positives but this England tour has been different. If we consider the opponents and the condition, this was Bangladesh's best tour especially because of our performance in the one day series," said former captain Khaled Mahmud who spoke to the press at the VIP lounge of Zia International Airport in the absence of coach Dav Whatmore, captain Habibul Bashar and vice-captain Khaled Mashud.

"When you are coming home with a victory against a team like Australia everything feels good. I am not the right man to comment on

the Test series because I was not there but I must say we have played a memorable one-day series and created an impression in world cricket," said the veteran all-rounder who added that his goal was to play in the 2007 World Cup in the West Indies.

Teenaged left-handed opener Shahriar Nafees Ahmed, who impressed with his doggedness and level-headed approach in his first tour with the senior side, best illustrated the buzz around the young side at the Zia International Airport.

"Cricket is my profession and that's why the question of fatigue or tiredness does not arise. Just look at Australia. They are scheduled to stay in England for three and half a months. That's the life of a professional cricketer," said Nafees when he was asked whether it would be difficult for him to motivate himself for a return to England with the Bangladesh A team in less than two weeks time.

Despite the joy of beating the world's number one team and overall good showing in the tri-series, the players refused to forget the miserable experience from the Test series against England where they lost both matches in just over two days.

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**YOU MADE US PROUD:** Young opener Shahriar Nafees gets a loving hug from his mother at the Zia International Airport upon the Bangladesh team's return from England yesterday morning. On the right is an ever-smiling Mohammad Ashraful who hit a match-winning 100 against Australia in the famous victory at Cardiff.



PHOTOS: ANISUR RAHMAN

## Cagers off to Delhi

**SPORTS REPORTER**

A 16-member Bangladesh national basketball team left Dhaka yesterday to participate in the 23rd FIBA-Asia Basketball Championship qualifiers.

The competition will be held in New Delhi from July 6-10.

**TEAM**

Rasheduzzaman, Sulip Barua, Lutfar Rahman, Mostafa Kamal Azad, Imran Khan, Toufik Elahi, Arfanuddin Ahmed, Mainul Abedin Munna, Atiqur Rahman, Tojammel Haque, Rajib Mahtab.

**Officials:** Mainul Ahsan Manju (manager), Sheikh Sajedullah Saju (assistant manager), AK Sarkar (coach), Mizanur Rahman (assistant coach) and Saeed Ahmed (referee).

## Pietersen given Ashes signal

AFP, London

South African-born batsman Kevin Pietersen looks set to make his Ashes debut for England at Lord's later this month after impressing selectors.

England chairman of selectors David Graveney admitted Pietersen had put forward 'irresistible case' for a place in the Ashes team against Australia, but said the selectors have

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## Did U Know?

Ricky Ponting's 45th fifty is his first against Bangladesh.



**Jose Pekerman**

(Argentina soccer coach)

"Let's not get desperate. Reaching the final shows that our competitive level was good enough, but we possibly faced the best team in the world in the final."

**After losing the Confederations Cup final against Brazil.**

# BCB plans tri-series to boost ICC ranking

## Zimbabwe, Kenya invited to play

**Cricket**

**SPORTS REPORTER**

In a bid to improve its one-day ranking before next year's ICC Champions Trophy tournament in India, Bangladesh wants to host a triangular series involving Zimbabwe and Kenya. The three-nation meet is expected to be held sometime from mid-November to January.

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Ali Asghar and his cricket operations committee chairman Mahbubul Anam, who accompanied the Tigers on their return from England, made the disclosure after attending an ICC executive committee meeting in London.

The new format for the Champions Trophy, where ICC ranking will be a major factor for teams hoping to get entry into the second

most important meet in the world, forced the BCB to arrange the one-day series.

Currently, Bangladesh lie bottom of the 11-team table after ICC associate members Kenya but the team's recent eight one-day victories will definitely push them ahead of the Kenyans when the rankings are updated next August.

"It is almost confirmed that our standing will improve in August this year as Kenya have not played any international cricket upto that period. But our main target is to obtain a better position by next April because the ranking of this month will be considered for the Champions Trophy that's why we are going to stage the triangular series," said Asghar.

As per new format six top ranked sides will gain direct entry while the other four teams of the table will play in a qualifying round where the two

best teams will join the party. Board officials informed that they had successful meetings with their Zimbabwean and Kenyan counterparts during the ICC meeting.

When asked whether Mirpur Stadium would be used during the series, Asghar was unduly worried by the fact that the new home of Bangladesh cricket would not be fully operational by this year.

"We have other ICC-recognised venues. So, even if the Mirpur Stadium is not ready in time we will arrange matches elsewhere," said Asghar.

The BCB president was also pleased with the newly formed Afro-Asian Cricket Council. Under the banner a three-match one-day series will take place in South Africa in this year between the Asia XI and Africa XI where some Bangladeshi players will feature beside those from India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

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## Brothers take on Abahani tomorrow

**SPORTS REPORTER**

Defending champions Brothers Union and Abahani will get an extra day to prepare for their Premier Bank Premier Football League battle after the Metropolis Football League Committee rescheduled the clash of the heavyweights due to inclement weather.

Today's crucial Brothers-Abahani match will now be held tomorrow at the Bangabandhu National Stadium at 5pm with both sides eyeing the second spot in the ten-team table.

First Division matches have also been rescheduled. It will also resume tomorrow with the Rahmatganj-Agrani Bank game, which was due to be held yesterday.

## PCB may try out neutral umpires

CRICINFO, undated

Pakistan are likely to appoint two neutral umpires for their one-day series at home against England later this year.

According to International Cricket Council (ICC) rules, only one third-country umpire is required to stand for a one-day, with the other umpire being from the home country.

But Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Shaharyar Khan said that they planned to go one step further.

"Making errors is a human trait. But when a home umpire gets it wrong, it might ignite strong reactions. This situation is least likely to happen in case of neutral umpires," Shaharyar told the BBC Sport website.

"When we play against India, the struggle can be felt everywhere in the two nations. Any mistake by a home umpire may cause resentment not only among fans but teams as well."

## Please forgive me: Warne

AFP, Sydney

Australian cricket star Shane Warne has begged his wife to take him back after they split over repeated sex scandals, local media reported Sunday.

Warne has told his wife Simone that he will seek counselling and end his womanising, the Sunday Telegraph said.

The couple announced their separation last month after almost 10 years of marriage after British tabloid newspapers reported that the leg-spin bowler had again had affairs with other women.

Warne, 35, told a friend he had begged Simone to forgive him, and the couple and their three children had been seen together on a Spanish holiday, the Sunday Telegraph said.

Warne's off-field behaviour could, however, cost him his 225,000 dollars annual commentary contract with Australian television Channel 9, the paper reported.

# Harmison a class act: McGrath

**Cricket**

AFP, London

Australia's Glenn McGrath, arguably the world's best fast bowler during the past decade, said he expected England's Stephen Harmison to play a major role in the forthcoming Ashes Tests after both men starred in Saturday's tied NatWest Series one-day final here at Lord's.

Appropriately, in a match that finished all square, the two key quicks each finished with returns of three for 27 from 10 overs, although McGrath had four maidens to Harmison's two.

At one stage during England's last tour of Australia in 2002-03, Harmison could barely complete his run-up.

But he has since become a central member of an England side that has now won its last five Test series, his height and pace making him an awkward proposition for even the world's best batsmen.

And he has also starred in one-day cricket, his haul Saturday against the world champions, making him the leading bowler in the tournament with 15 wickets at a miserly average of just over 15 apiece.

Now England fans will be hoping that the 26-year-old 6ft 4" Durham paceman can stay fit for the three upcoming one-dayers against Australia and the Ashes Tests, which start at Lord's on July 22.

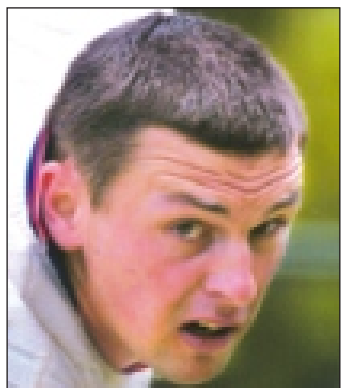
"I think Harmy is a class bowler," McGrath, 35, told reporters after Saturday's match. "There's no doubt about that and I think he's one of the main reasons England have improved over the last 18 months

and one of the reasons why they've been so successful.

"To have a bowler bowling at that pace with that lift and bounce, it's got to give the rest of the team confidence."

However, there were fears Harmison had gone off the boil following a disappointing series in South Africa during the northern winter.

But England captain Michael Vaughan said: "I thought Harmy today was, as he has been throughout the whole series, outstanding."



**STEPHEN HARMISON**

Just because you have a couple of bad games in the winter doesn't make you a bad bowler."

Australia's new-ball bowlers though, who face England again at Headingley on Thursday, could be pleased with their work against the hosts' top order.

In particular the remorselessly accurate McGrath appeared to reassert the dominance he'd enjoyed in previous contests against Marcus Trescothick, whom he dismissed once more Saturday.

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# A team sans SAFF heroes?

**Football**

**AL MUSABBIR SADI**

It would not be surprising to see the Bangladesh national football team without SAFF Football Championship heroes like Matiuir Munna, who scored a stunner in their semifinal victory over India, or defensive stalwarts like Rajani, adjudged the best player a couple of years ago in the championship at home.

Like the above two, many senior players are also facing the axe from the national squad simply for lack of form.

The situation is not at all healthy, especially when Bangladesh are due to start the defence of their SAFF crown in less than six months in Pakistan.

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has already decided to start the camp after the end of the ongoing Premier Football League but the selection panel -featuring four BFF coaches - is really worried.

"The senior players have not really been in form. At this moment, many of the big names would not be picked unless they improve," said

one of the selectors yesterday to The Daily Star Sport seeking anonymity.

Even after two warm-up tournaments and seven rounds of the Premier League most of the current national players have failed to impress, especially the defenders.

With Rajani, Nazrul, Hassan and Sujan - the core of the team's central defence - playing below par, it would be difficult to find out their replacements.

"We can't change everything overnight. Four new faces won't make any sense. What we are planning to do is to keep two senior players and push two new ones into the fold if all the seniors do not recover in time. That would keep everyone under pressure," the BFF coach told.

He also added that they have yet to find a quality left-back since Masud Rana's retirement.

This position has been a constant worry and in the recent past, coaches were forced to use makeshift midfielders Parvez Babu and Munna or Titu, a specialist right-back.

"Hassan Al Mamun will definitely be the first choice on the right side of defence but he has been used in different positions this season for

club interest. Sometimes, players used in various places lose their sharpness when they return to their genuine position. He might survive because of his talent but I am not confident the others can cope with it.

"We have noticed that Kanchan, a striker, had to play as a defender in the left side and this has made the natural attacker lose his prowess. He will certainly not be in the side if it is picked now.

"Sometimes, excessive training for the club also makes player tired so they can not give hundred per cent. It could also be the case for the leading footballers' lack of form," he added.

Before the SAFF Championship, Bangladesh will also go into the Asian Cup qualifiers and the preliminary camp is expected to start with 40 players. This time, the BFF will not release the players of the national camp for the National Football League for international commitment.

The selector, supporting the idea, said that it would keep the players fresh. "Otherwise they would be tired following a long season like previous occasions. If the coach gets three months, he would be able to

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# Venus puts it all behind her

**WIMBLEDON**

REUTERS, London

Venus recovered her glow at Wimbledon on Saturday.

The older of the two Williams sisters radiated happiness after her record two-hour 45-minute 4-6, 7-6, 9-7 victory over compatriot Lindsay Davenport secured a third Wimbledon title.

The win ended the 25-year-old's streak of five successive defeats in Grand Slam finals - all by younger sister Serena - but the former world number one said she had never doubted herself.

"I knew my destiny was to be in the winner's circle," said Venus, sporting a glittering salmon pink dress and gold loop ear-rings at her post-match news conference.

"There were times along the way when I didn't make it there. But I felt my destiny was definitely to win big titles, win lots of titles."

Venus's last Grand Slam win was at the 2001 US Open and at Wimbledon she was seeded only 14, therefore becoming the lowest seed to win the women's singles.

A month ago she was embarrassed by 15-year-old Bulgarian Sesil Karatantcheva in the third round of the French Open, having lost in the fourth round of the Australian Open at the start of the year.

On Sunday, however, she became the first women's singles champion at Wimbledon to win having been a match point down since Helen Wills Moody in 1935. It was the longest women's final on record.

"For sure, it has special meaning," said Venus, who also beat Davenport

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PHOTO: AFP

**GLOWING VENUS:** American Venus Williams holds the winner's trophy after beating compatriot Lindsay Davenport in the Wimbledon singles final on Saturday.