

## Omar, Baisya save blushes

Cricket

AL MUSABBIR SADI from Colombo

Opener Javed Omar and tail-ender Tapash Baisya were the only bright spots in an otherwise lacklustre batting display by Bangladeshi batsmen who threw away a golden opportunity to prepare for the Test series. The Tigers' three-day warm-up match began with a familiar batting collapse that saw them crash to 195 all out after being put in by a Sri Lanka Development Squad at the Colts Cricket Club ground on Wednesday.

The local boys, led by Test batsman Thilan Samaraweera wiped out 109 of those runs for the loss of two wickets at close on Day One. Opener Santha Kalavitiigoda (54 off 101 balls) and Samaraweera (4) were at the crease when stumps were drawn due to bad light.

Omar's chanceless 81 and a strokeful 54 by Baisya gave the total some respectability after new ball

bowlers Tharanga Lakshitha (2-62) and Udara Waruna (2-64) had made the most of a lively wicket to reduce the visitors to 27-4 inside eight overs.

Nafees Iqbal, playing his first match in the series, chased a wide delivery from his crease and was brilliantly caught by wicketkeeper Gihan de Silva for a nine-ball duck in the third over.

Two balls later, Lakshitha knocked over Tushar Imran's middle-stump before Waruna took charge at the other end.

Mohammad Ashraf got one that kept low and was plumb in front while Shahriar Nafees was fooled by a vicious inswinger that rattled his off-stump.

Once settled, Javed began to hammer the ball around park. He raced to his half century in 60 balls by cutting Waruna for his eighth boundary.

With Aftab Ahmed, the opener added 41 but an incisive spell of bowling by promising left-arm pacer Gayan Wijekoon (3-35) reduced Bangladesh to 117-7 by the first

over after lunch.

Aftab scooped a half volley to midwicket while Gihan gloved a superb catch standing just behind the wicket to dismiss Khaled Mashud. Manjarul Islam was leg before.

Javed was finally given lbw even after playing a long way forward against legspinner Gihan Rupasinghe, who mopped the tail with 3-31 from 7.3 overs.

Javed, who faced 109 deliveries hit 11 fours and one six over point off Lakshitha.

Tapash, who played with authority from the very beginning, clubbed half a dozen fours and a six over long-off during his 76-ball effort that must have embarrassed some of the specialist batsmen in the side.

He eventually perished when he swept Rupasinghe to deep square leg to bring an end to the Bangladesh innings.

There were mixed fortunes in fielding as Manjarul dropped opener Harsha Vithana early in the slips but a spectacular one-handed

## Massive fine on Rafique

AL MUSABBIR SADI from Colombo

The Bangladesh Cricket Board yesterday fined Mohammad Rafique 75 per cent of his match fee for his misconduct with coach Dav Whatmore during Tuesday's practice session in Colombo.

The Board took the punitive measure following a recommendation of the tour management that apparently refrained from going for any disciplinary action against the leading wicket-taker in the backdrop of growing injury concern.

Rafique, who is nursing a bruised right knee, was involved in a heated verbal exchange with Whatmore while complaining about a 'nonchalant attitude by team physio Paul Close.

While the Board slapped the ill-tempered left-arm spinner with the hefty fine, the mood in Sri Lanka saw a dramatic change. Close and Rafique turned friends overnight.

Both spent long hours chatting and walking together at the Colts Cricket Club ground during

## Ashes finale from today

Cricket

REUTERS, London

In the end, all will be decided at The Oval.

England's and Australia's cricketers have been exchanging blows since mid-June but it may take five more days, in the fifth and final Test starting on Thursday, for the conclusive punch to be thrown.

For Ricky Ponting, the challenge could not be clearer: win and retain the Ashes, albeit after being held 2-2, or go down in the history books as the first Australia captain for almost two decades who lost them.

"It's basically a one-Test series now, irrespective of what has happened," Ponting's teammate Shane Warne said on Tuesday.

For Michael Vaughan's team, despite the loss of injured fast bowler Simon Jones, there is slightly more room for manoeuvre. A draw will be enough to give England their first

victory in the series since 1986-87.

Should they fail, the home side will probably be forgiven. England had been expected to stretch the world champions but few predicted they would play with such panache, let alone record an outright victory.

Paceman Glenn McGrath had forecast a 5-0 series whitewash for Australia but, with a game to go, England have scored faster, notched up more runs and taken more wickets. They have out-scored Australia.

The consequences of defeat are likely to be serious for several members of the touring party.

Losing to Bangladesh in the triangular series before the Tests was bad enough. Losing the Ashes would be unforgivable.

Ponting's leadership, as well as his mental equilibrium after ranting over England's use of specialist substitute fielders, has already been questioned.

So has the coaching of John Buchanan, while several Australian batsmen and a couple of their bowlers

may also be checking the situations vacant columns on their return home. Australia's luck, however, may be changing at the right time.

McGrath, as important a cog for the world champions as leg-spinner Warne, has got over his elbow problem. He looked back to his top speed in the nets on Tuesday, although his fitness test was reassessed on Wednesday.

In contrast Simon Jones, a reverse-swinging revelation for England throughout the series, failed to get through his fitness test on his ankle problem on Tuesday and was sent home.

If Ponting wins the toss and opts to bat, his side could go into The Oval finale confident of living up to their own expectations at last.

They have been roundly outplayed in the previous three Tests. Each time England have dominated from the off, posting big first-innings scores and reducing the Australians to playing catch-up.

Ponting has repeatedly bemoaned his batsmen's poor form

but England's bowlers, led by Steve Harmison, Andrew Flintoff and Jones, would argue they have been party to that.

Not one of Australia's top seven has managed to match his career average during the series, the worst offenders being Adam Gilchrist and Damien Martyn.

Gilchrist, celebrated for so long as the world's most destructive batsman, had boasted an average of 61.18 against the English. In this Ashes series, it is 22.57.

Martyn had scored 54 per innings against England but this time is averaging 21. Opening batsman Matthew Hayden, despite a timely 150 against Essex on Sunday, has not scored a century for 30 Test innings.

England once worried about the ability of their 'pie throwers' to claim 20 Australian wickets in a match but, to date, they have taken 79 out of the available 80.

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## Bashar leaves for Colombo

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar left Dhaka yesterday to re-join the team in Sri Lanka.

The 33-year-old skipper, who had returned home on Monday to see his ailing mother, said before his leaving that improvement in the condition of Rizia Begum, who had suffered a stroke last week in Bashar's home town of Kushtia, prompted his earlier than expected departure.

"After the angiogram in the morning, the doctors said that she only has to take medicines to recover fully. I am leaving a much relieved man and hopefully I will get another good news in Sri Lanka that my main bowler Mashrafe (Bin Mortuza) will be fully fit before the first Test," said Bashar.

## Tigers may tour India next year

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Bangladesh are likely to undertake their first official tour of India sometime next year, the Times of India newspaper reported Wednesday quoting unidentified officials of cricket boards of the two countries.

Senior officials of Bangladesh and Indian boards had met in Dubai

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PHOTO: AFP

Javed Omar (L) takes the road to pavilion as Sri Lankan Dev Squad players celebrate the Bangladesh opener's

## LANKA DIARY

AL MUSABBIR SADI from Colombo

Life after tsunami in Colombo has become difficult with thousands of homeless people pouring into the Sri Lankan capital just to keep their body and soul together.

Saman Perera, who now drives a three-wheeler in Colombo, is one of those millions devastated by the December 26 disaster that claimed 31,000 lives in the coastal belt of the emerald island alone.

He had been leading a peaceful life in the picturesque city of Galle and was an avid follower of cricket. But now Saman works 20 hours a day not just to earn some more money but to stay away from the dreadful memories of the devastating tsunamis that swept away his entire family.

"I was in the capital when my entire family was wiped away by the tsunami. My parents, my wife and all three kids died. When I got back to my home near Galle, there was no trace of their bodies. I returned to Colombo and has been working like a machine since then," Perera

sighed. "I checked thousands of bodies but could not identify any of my family members. Now I am afraid to sleep because their faces haunt me in my dreams. That's why I work long hours and take minimum of rest."

Saman is now living in one of those camps built around the city. Sri Lanka has so far received about 460 million US dollars on tsunami relief project from foreign donors. The country has estimated the reconstruction cost at US dollars 1.6 billion. But there are victims like Saman who do not care about anything anymore.

**LOW TURN-OUTS** Cricket is the number one game in Sri Lanka. A limited-overs match means a full-house. But that had not been the case in the three one-dayers against Bangladesh.

Sri Lanka Cricket's (SLC) president Jayantha Dharmadasa was disappointed at the low turn out of fans in those three low-side affairs that the home side won easily.

"It's Sunday, but see, what has

happened. The galleries are empty," said the SLC chief during the third and final one-dayer at the Premadasa Stadium.

The second match was also played here on Friday. The authorities tried to provide some cheers for the home team by brining buses full of school students for the match before final disappointment on a public holiday.

There was however few crazy fans, who made their lively presence felt beating drums constantly during the inconsequential third game. It was just a reminder that the queues grow longer and the drum-beating turns even louder whenever there is a chance of a real contest.

Bangladesh lost all the three matches so badly that the knowledgeable Sri Lankan cricket fans were least bothered to turn up in numbers sensing it would not worth spending the hard-earned money.

But the scenario was totally different when India came here to play in a tri-series that also involved West Indies.

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## BCB won't renew Dudhia's deal

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) will not renew the contract of its chief executive officer (CEO) Maqbul (Macky) Dudhia.

The Zimbabwean's two-year term expired at the end of this month but according to sources he will continue working until December as the BCB reportedly failed to give him a three-month prior notice of its intention as per a clause in his contract.

It was also learnt that BCB president Ali Asghar had confirmed before leaving for Sri Lanka on September 3 that the board will look for a new CEO after Dudhia's current term expires.

Dudhia joined the BCB as its first ever CEO on October 2003.

## Farashganj finish sixth

SPORTS REPORTER

Farashganj Sporting Club finished sixth in the Premier Bank Premier Division Football League when they drew goalless in their last game against Arambagh Krira Sangha at Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The old town club, who were promoted this season, completed their campaign with 23 points from 18 matches while Arambagh secured 20 points from same number of outings.

The first-leg meeting between the two teams also ended in a goalless draw.

## SCHOOL FOOTBALL Wins for Govt. Laboratory, Rayer Bazar

SPORTS REPORTER

Government Laboratory High School and Rayer Bazar High School moved into the final round of the Pran-Cola School Football tournament beating their respective rivals at Dhanmondi Club ground yesterday.

Govt. Laboratory blanked Birshrestha Noor Mohammad Rifles Public School 2-0 and Rayer Bazar earned a comfortable 3-0 victory over Rajdhani High School.

## England undecided on team

Cricket

AFP, London

England captain Michael Vaughan said Wednesday that fast bowler James Anderson and all-rounder Paul Collingwood were still battling it out for the final place in the side ahead of the crunch final Ashes Test against Australia here at The Oval.

England, 2-1 up in the five-match encounter and looking to win their first Ashes series since 1986-87, had been hoping to field an unchanged side for the match which starts at the south London venue on Thursday.

But an ankle injury sustained by fast bowler Simon Jones in England's three-wicket fourth Test win at Trent Bridge, frustrated the team's hopes of fielding the same side in a five-match Ashes series for the first time since 1884-85.

Both all-rounder Collingwood, who has scored 1,053 runs at 58.83 in the County Championship so far this season and fast bowler Anderson, who played the last of his 12 Tests in South Africa in January, were called up into the squad at the weekend.

Australia need to take 20 wickets to win the match and retain the Ashes, which is an argument for

bringing Collingwood, who has played two Tests, into the side. But,

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PHOTO: AFP

England captain Michael Vaughan sets the field during his side's practice session at The Oval on Wednesday.

## 'I won't be a scapegoat'

Cricket

REUTERS, London

Australia captain Ricky Ponting says he should not be made into a scapegoat if his side loses the Ashes.

Ponting was asked by reporters whether he feared for his job if the world champions failed to retain the Ashes by winning the fifth and final Test against England at The Oval which starts on Thursday.

"I would hate to think if I lost this series it is only my fault, all coming back to me," Ponting said. "I have never been one who has sat back and taken all the accolades when the team has gone well. I think it would be unfair if it was my fault we lose this Ashes series."

Australia have held the Ashes for the past eight series. A draw at The Oval will mean England regaining them for the first time since 1986-87.

Ponting's leadership has been criticised in comparison with that of England captain Michael Vaughan. He also lost his composure and was fined for a furious outburst after being dismissed in the fourth Test.

"Around the team I would have thought I have done most things right along the way," said Australia's captain.

"Maybe I haven't scored as many runs as I would have liked but at different times I think I have batted quite well.

"The plans have all been there but whether it is my fault we haven't been able to execute them, I am not sure.

"At the end of the day, it is all of us. We are all responsible for the way we have played.

"I wouldn't like to think anyone (in the Australia squad) is playing for

batting averages. But England have still dominated the last three Tests, winning two of them.

"I am the captain but I am not batting for everyone in the side and I am not bowling for everyone," said Ponting. "I am trying to point guys in the right direction."

"I am doing the best I can and I am sure the other guys are trying their best as well, we just haven't put it together yet."

Coach John Buchanan has also been criticised by the media.

Ponting was asked if Buchanan, whose contract is about to run out, retained the support of the players.

"Most definitely," he said. "It is not absolute panic stations for us as far as all our personnel and coaching staff are concerned.

"If we happen to win this last Test match then I am sure a lot of the stuff we are talking about here right now will be forgotten."

Ponting has admitted making an error in putting England in to bat after winning the toss in the second Test at Edgbaston. Vaughan's side won there before going 2-1 up in the series.

He also conceded he might have set overly defensive fields at times but argued: "You are going on what you think is right at the time."

Ponting said his side had probably been boosted by the news that

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RICKY PONTING

their future in the game."

Ponting hit 156, Australia's only century of the series, to help save the third Test and heads his side's

## Clijsters, Sharapova sail into semis

US OPEN

REUTERS, New York

The burning desire of Kim Clijsters illuminated New York's midnight hour on Tuesday, and her reward was a place in the US Open semifinals.

Fourth seed Clijsters overturned a set and 4-2 deficit against Wimbledon champion Venus Williams to claim a 4-6, 7-5, 6-1 quarterfinal victory that she described as the best of her career.

In the last four of the in-form Belgian will face Russian top seed Maria Sharapova, who clawed her way to an equally compelling 7-5, 4-6, 6-4 win over compatriot Nadia Petrova.

Men's champion Roger Federer safely reached the quarterfinals despite the shock of dropping a set against German Nicolas Kiefer, but for the first time the women's singles took the spotlight with its two quarterfinals providing a five-hour slab of spellbinding action.

Clijsters lost four grand slam finals before a chronic wrist injury threatened her career in 2004, and was jubilant in her moment of triumph after wearing out Williams in a match that finished 36 minutes into Wednesday morning.

"This definitely means a lot more than any win that I had before my surgery," the 22-year-old said. "I was seeing the ball really well out there. I just kept going for it."

A moody Sharapova repeated her Wimbledon quarterfinal victory over Petrova in a ferocious duel to reach the Flushing Meadows semifinals for the first time.

The 18-year-old Siberian withstood a strong Petrova comeback in a match blighted by dubious line calls. She failed to serve out for victory in the third set at 5-3 but a ripped backhand service return in the next game secured her semifinal place.

"I wasn't fighting out there basically in the second set. It was like I was giving it up," Sharapova said.

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PHOTO: AFP

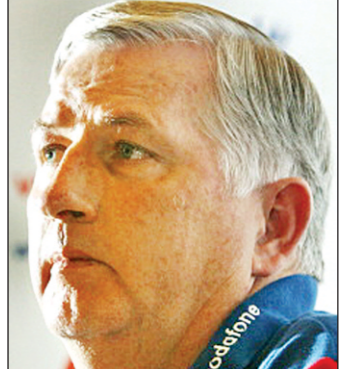
First seeded Russian Maria Sharapova in action against ninth seed and compatriot Nadia Petrova at the US Open at the Flushing Meadows on Tuesday.

**What to WATCH**

**ESPN**  
England vs Australia  
Fifth Test, Day One  
Live at 3:30 pm  
Sportscentre  
Live at 10:30 pm

**TEN Sports**  
US Open

**TALK TURKEY**



### Duncan Fletcher

(England cricket coach)  
"I'm going through the 2007 World Cup and we'll see what happens after that. My enthusiasm is as strong as ever."

Revealing his intention to remain England's cricket coach.

**DAY'S EVENT**

Premier Football League  
Sheikh Russel vs Dipali Sangha