

## Troubled Tigers

Cricket

AL MUSABBIR SADI from Colombo

Trouble always invites more trouble. That has been the case of Bangladesh on their tour of Sri Lanka so far.

Before the business leg of their tour starts, the Tigers find themselves in a strange situation of having no frontline bowlers as both Mashrafe bin Mortuza and Tapash Baisya had to be sent home after they failed to recover from niggling injuries. They joined batsman Rajin Saleh on the injury list.

And obviously, that has put a lot of strain on the team management ahead of the Test series.

"Whose next?" when this unavoidable question was hurled at team physio Paul Close at the end of the three-day practice match on Friday. The Australian had no reply but to shrug it off with a wry smile.

In the absence of Mashrafe and Tapash, Bangladesh have been reduced to fielding probably its weakest and most inexperienced pace attack for a five-day contest.

And with the batsmen yet to show consistency, they can hardly afford another injured player.

However, there was concern over Syed Rasel, who looks set to

make his Test debut after an impressive entrance to the one-day scene. The left-arm seamer complained about a calf-muscle pain during the three-day match.

But the fragile batting for the first Test at the Premadasa Stadium on September 12 will be bolstered by the return captain Habibul Bashar who had to fly home in the middle of the tour to see his ailing mother. "I was worried yesterday when I heard that Tapash have to go back. It is a big setback to go into the Test without our two most experienced pacers. Injuries happen, but it's unfortunate that we've had two together," he said at the Premadasa Stadium.

"The three pacers we have got are inexperienced but they are quality bowlers. I am hopeful that they will fight."

Bashar among other things will be particularly concerned at the lack runs scored by his two young openers.

With a fine 81 in the practice match and good starts in the one-day series behind him, the seasoned Javed Omar is not threatened by any of his junior partners -- Test opener Nafees Iqbal or one-day opener Shahriar Nafees. It's rather which one of the juniors will join him for the opening slot.

Iqbal has opened with Javed in the last seven Tests but his 33 runs (8, 3, 7, 15) in four innings in England and the dipping form in

limited-overs matches saw the Chittagong lad dropped from the ODI series against Sri Lanka.

He also failed to justify his inclusion in the Test squad by scoring 0 and 5 in the practice match against a third-string Lankan team.

On the other hand, Nafees -- the Bangladesh A captain yet to make Test debut -- has two advantages. He is the only specialist left-handed batsman in the side and was the only player who consistently scored in the one-dayers (39, 51, 21).

With the rival attack to be built around left-arm seamer Chaminda Vaas and master off-spinner Muttiah Muralitharan, his inclusion could help the side weather the storm because both type of bowlers have relatively low success rate against left-handers.

If Iqbal, who scored a match-saving century against Zimbabwe at home to contribute to Bangladesh's only Test series triumph, is chosen to open, Nafees will have to bat down the order. In that case, in-form Tushar Imran's return to the Test side might be delayed.

Tushar, who last played a Test match against South Africa three years ago, smashed two centuries and a number of fifties to claim a recall and his occasional off-spin would also be handy.

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## Faruque flies to Colombo

SPORTS REPORTER

Chief selector Faruque Ahmed will fly to Colombo today to be by the side of the struggling Bangladesh cricket team in Sri Lanka.

Faruque, also a former national captain, is scheduled to reach the Sri Lankan capital before the first Test starts on Monday.

Faruque said that he was going there as part of the board's policy of sending one of its three selectors while the Tigers are in tours. But his job this time would be more than just involving in the selection of the injury-plagued team. Faruque played a very significant role during Bangladesh's tour of England a few months ago.

The biggest problem Faruque and his selection panel is now facing is to pick two pacemen among a set of rookies after the new-ball pair of Mashrafe bin Mortuza and Tapash Baisya were ruled out due to injury.

"This is really a big setback for the team but we have decided today not to send any replacement for Tapash. I think three pacers is good enough considering the conditions of Sri Lanka but after the first Test we will rethink about the matter," said Faruque, who returned home couple of days back from United States.

Returning after a one-month leave, Faruque refused to comment on the Bangladesh's poor show in the three-match one-day series and said that it would be wise to support boys at the moment instead of criticizing them.

"We must support them (players) because they are going through a bad time both on and off the field," he added.

## School football

SPORTS REPORTER

The Pran-Cola school football tournament final round line-up was completed as Residential Model School and Mirpur Bangla High School confirmed their berths after beating their respective rivals at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

Residential Model managed a hard-fought 2-1 victory against St. Joseph High School while Mirpur Bangla beat National Bangla School by 5-4 in tiebreaker.

The ten-team final round will start from September 15.

## BFF's thirty probables

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) on Saturday announced a 30-member preliminary squad for the AFC Under-20 football championship.

The BFF's team management committee asked the selected booters to report on September 15 at its Motijheel office at 3pm. The residential camp will start on the same day at BKSP.

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## Rains stop Aussies after Langer ton

Cricket

AFP, London

England finally saw the back of Justin Langer to break the best stand of this Ashes series on the third day of the fifth Test against Australia at The Oval here Saturday.

No sooner had Stephen Harmison bowled Langer for 105 than the rain which had marred the day's play returned before Australia captain Ricky Ponting could take guard.

Australia were 185 for one, 188 runs behind England's first innings 373 with Matthew Hayden 70 not out.

The bad weather kept the players off the field for 95 minutes until tea, over two-and-a-half hours lost in all to the elements, in a match Australia had to win to level the series at 2-2 and retain their 16-year grip on the Ashes.

At lunch Australia were 157 without loss, Langer 91 not out and Hayden unbeaten on 60 after only 14 overs were possible in the session. Afterwards Langer completed his 22nd Test hundred and fourth against England when he steered Harmison, England's fastest bowler, down to third man for four, having faced 142 balls with two sixes and 10 fours.

Another similar boundary saw Langer become only the eighth Australian to score 7,000 Test runs.

But England then got the breakthrough they wanted after 52 overs of trying when Langer, on 105, inside-edged a Harmison delivery on to his thigh before the ball clipped off-stump.

Langer's was only the second century by an Australian batsman this series after captain Ricky Ponting's

156 in the drawn third Test at Old Trafford and together with Hayden he's shared the best partnership for any wicket by either side in this Ashes campaign.

Hayden, who hadn't scored more than 70 in his 30 previous Test innings, had faced 175 balls in four minutes short of four hours.

Australia resumed Saturday on

112 without loss, 261 behind, having gone off for bad light immediately after tea on Friday.

But Langer, having seen leg-spin great Shane Warne take six for 122 in England's first innings, said after stumps Friday there was still plenty of time for Australia to win the match.

He began Saturday on 75 not out with Hayden 32 not out as the left-handed pair shared their 14th century partnership.

It was their first in 21 Test innings since putting on 137 in the first innings of November's second Test against New Zealand in Adelaide.

In overcast conditions Langer survived a huge lbw shout from Matthew Hoggard off the first ball of the day when he missed the Yorkshireman's inswinger.

Replays suggested the ball had pitched on and would have hit leg-stump but New Zealand umpire Billy Bowden ruled in favour of Langer, dropped on 53 on Friday by Marcus Trescothick at first slip off Paul Collingwood, a difficult chance.

Further lbw appeals from Hoggard and impressive all-rounder Andrew Flintoff, whose first five overs Saturday cost just five runs, followed in the swing-friendly conditions.

### SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at tea on the third day of the fifth and final Ashes Test between England and Australia at The Oval in London on Saturday:

ENGLAND: First innings 373 (Strauss 129, Flintoff 72; Warne 6-122)

AUSTRALIA: First innings (over-night 112-0)  
Langer b Harmison 105  
Hayden not out 70

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CENTURY NUMBER 22ND: Australia opener Justin Langer blows a kiss to the crowd upon reaching his hundred at The Oval on Saturday.



PHOTO: STAR

WHO WILL OPEN FINALLY? The specialist openers (L-R) Shahriar Nafees, Javed Omar and Nafees Iqbal jog after the three-day practice match at the Colts Cricket Club on Friday. The question is who will open the innings with Omar.

### What to WATCH

ESPN

England vs Australia  
Fifth Test, Day Four  
Live at 3:30 pm

STAR Sports

English Premier Football League  
Bolton Wanderers vs Blackburn Rovers  
Live at 8:55 pm

TEN Sports

US Open  
Women's Doubles Final  
Live at 11:00 pm  
Men's Final  
Live at 2:00 am (Monday)

## Three Indians hit hundreds

Cricket

REUTERS, Mutare

Virender Sehwag, Gautam Gambhir and Rahul Dravid smashed centuries to give India control of the three-day tour match against a Zimbabwe Board XI on Friday.

India ended the second day with a 71-run lead after reaching 365 for two at the close. The hosts had declared their first innings during the morning session on 294 for nine.

Sehwag raced to 123 off 118 balls, hitting 22 fours and two sixes,

while Gambhir contributed 126 runs before he was trapped lbw by fast bowler Anthony Ireland.

Dravid recovered from his recent poor form during the triangular series, involving Zimbabwe and New Zealand, to compile an unruffled 102 not out in three hours.

Earlier, Dion Ebrahim could add only six runs to his overnight score before falling for 169, while Keith Dabengwa scored 60. Both are likely to have done enough to warrant a call-up in Zimbabwe's squad for next week's first Test against India.

Leg-spinner Anil Kumble was the pick of the bowlers with five for 48.

## Clijsters, Pierce end Russian dreams

US OPEN

REUTERS, New York

Kim Clijsters will play for the biggest purse in the history of women's sport in Saturday's US Open final after beating Russian top seed Maria Sharapova in the semifinals.

The athletic Belgian fourth seed needed six match points to kill off the stubborn Siberian 6-2, 6-7, 6-3 on Friday, setting up a final against French 12th seed Mary Pierce.

Pierce became the first Frenchwoman to reach the final but was left denying accusations of gamesmanship after her 3-6, 6-2, 6-2 semifinal win over Elena Dementieva on a day of double misery for Russia.

Clijsters was left with a different kind of double to consider.

The Belgian who has lost all four of her previous Grand Slam finals will have the added incentive of a double-your-money 2.2 million dollar (1.2 million pound) payout if

she wins against Pierce, her reward for having topped the pre-Slam US Open Series rankings.

Sharapova served abysmally for much of their semifinal but made an extraordinary recovery from 5-6, 0-40 down in the second set to force a third set.

The 18-year-old again fought back from 4-0 down to make a fight

of the decider but Clijsters, with six titles to her name this year, ultimately deserved a victory she sealed at the sixth attempt when Sharapova netted a tired forehand.

The Belgian former world number one has raced back up the rankings since recovering from wrist surgery last year and will start Saturday's final a strong favourite.

"It was tough, I gave everything I had on those match points but she just came up with better shots," said Clijsters.

Clijsters will double her prize money even if she loses on Saturday but she said: "I'm not really playing for the money I just want to go out there and have fun."

"Since my injury playing tennis means so much more. It's my first grand slam final since my injury so let's go for it."

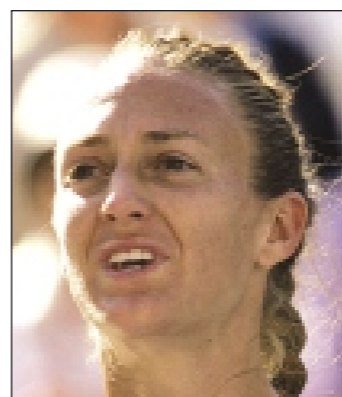
Sharapova broke in the first game but went downhill fast. She lost her serve eight times in the match, twice more than she had in her five previous matches.

The Florida-based Russian, who says she has grown two inches this year, blamed her inferior athleticism.

"I gave it all in that tiebreaker but I ran out of gas in the third set," she groaned.

"Physically I still have to get a lot better. This is not something that is going to happen overnight. I'm 18 and my body's still growing."

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MARY PIERCE



KIM CLIJSTERS