

Tigers reach Jamaica

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh cricket team reached Jamaica yesterday from Barbados to attend today's World Cup opening ceremony.

Habibul Bashar's men played a triangular series involving Bermuda and Canada before taking on New Zealand and Scotland in the official warm-up games and they won both matches.

Bangladesh will launch their World Cup campaign on March 17 by taking on former champions India and then meet another holders Sri Lanka on March 19 and face off with Bermuda on March 25 in the Group B matches in Trinidad and Tobago.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 7



Did U Know?

Former English bowler Bernard Bosanquet from Middlesex invented the googly.

What to WATCH

BTV

2007 Cricket World Cup Opening Ceremony

Live at 5:00 am (Monday)

STAR Sports

FA Cup

Chelsea v Tottenham

Live at 6:40 pm

Blackburn v Man City

Live at 9:55 pm

Plymouth v Watford

Live at 12:00 am (Monday)

Primera Liga

Osasuna v Valencia

Live at 2:00 am (Monday)

TALK TURKEY



Brian Lara

(West Indies cricket captain)

"I'm only 37 -- a lot of players stretch their careers into their 40s, and I just think there's a lot of work to do to get West Indies cricket back on track."

On his intention to keep playing into his 40s.

DAY'S EVENT

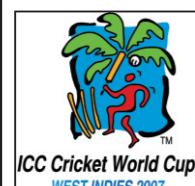
Bangladesh A v England A

Third One-Day

Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium

A long way from '75

AFP, Bridgetown



Thirty-two years after the first World Cup was decided over a modest five playing days, the 2007 edition will open on Sunday and will go on and on until April 28.

The 16-team World Cup in the Caribbean will last 48 days with 51 matches broadcast live to an estimated worldwide audience of 1.5 billion people.

Those are monstrous proportions compared to the first tournament in England in 1975 when the West Indies won the first of their two world titles.

Back then Clive Lloyd's West Indians pocketed 4,000 British pounds and 10,000 pounds for retaining the title in 1979.

The 2007 champions will take home a cool 2.2 million dollars.

But to reach that stage, the tournament's leading players will face a test as much of stamina, patience

and purse strings as bat and ball.

Selecting a winner is no easy task in a tournament which lasts for the best part of two months and involves an exhausting schedule of inter-island travel.

Even world champions Australia, beaten three times in a row by England and then suffering at the hands of New Zealand earlier in the year, are looking vulnerable.

They are without strike bowler Brett Lee who misses the tournament due to ankle ligament damage while all-rounder Andrew Symonds and opener Matthew Hayden are both carrying injuries.

Nevertheless, as they showed when Shane Warne was kicked out at the start of the last World Cup in South Africa for drugs offences, Australia are capable of overcoming the loss of key players and still winning.

There were signs of an ominous return to form in their comfortable win against England in a warm-up game in St Vincent on Friday.

England too have fitness worries, starting with captain Michael Vaughan, who recently sustained a hamstring injury having been out for

most of the past year with a knee problem.

Vaughan hit a confident half-century in the defeat against Australia to suggest that he is slowly approaching his best form.

India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, all former winners, have reason to fancy their chances.

India led by Rahul Dravid and with Sachin Tendulkar, Yuvraj Singh and the restored Sourav Ganguly, has a powerful batting line-up.

Ganguly, who starred in the 2-1 home win over Sri Lanka on his return to the side in January, said: "We will get similar wickets in the West Indies and it is good that the players are in good form. This is a good outfit."

Pakistan, as always, have plenty of dramas going on.

Fast bowlers Shoaib Akhtar and Mohammad Asif, who have been at the centre of doping allegations, miss out through injury.

Sri Lanka, with Sanath Jayasuriya still a potent force, have several aggressive strokemakers and, in off-spinner Muttiah Muralidaran, together with pacemen Chaminda Vaas and the awkward

Lasith Malinga, an attack that can overcome the odds stacked against bowlers in one-dayers.

For world number one South Africa, the challenge will be to keep their nerve.

In 1999 they went out in a semi-final tie against Australia and four years ago a failure to understand the Duckworth-Lewis regulations for rain-affected matches saw them exit against Sri Lanka.

They remain without a frontline spinner but any side that can score 438, a world record for a one-day international between two Test nations, as they did against Australia last year in Johannesburg, has to be respected.

However, their two warm-up games -- where they just escaped being embarrassed by Ireland before losing to Pakistan -- have not inspired confidence.

New Zealand have a canny captain in Stephen Fleming and in Ross Taylor a batsman who will help them overcome the shock retirement of Nathan Astle.

West Indies, under the captaincy of Brian Lara can, battle a

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5



PHOTO: STAR

Chittagong Mohammedan defender Shahidur Rahman receives the ball as Muktijoddha Sangsads striker Alfaaz Ahmed (L) watches during their B.League encounter at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong yesterday.

India crush Windies

AFP, Daniel Town



India completed a morale-boosting nine-wicket victory over the West Indies in their final World Cup warm-up match here on Friday. Chasing a modest 86 for victory, India hit the jackpot with 31.2 overs to spare, when Dwayne Bravo delivered a no-ball to Robin Uthappa.

Uthappa was not out on 35 and Dinesh Karthik was unbeaten on 38.

They added 80 for the second wicket, after Virender Sehwag was caught behind off Daren Powell for a duck in the second over.

"It was a really good performance on Friday. We had the opportunity to bowl first and had helpful conditions," said India skipper Rahul Dravid.

"We put the ball in the right areas and took our catches. We will take a lot of confidence from this into the World Cup."

"Our body language is good and we have had some good results behind us. We have key players who are coming into form and fitness and results like this give us great momentum."

India's seam bowlers destroyed the West Indies' batting on a helpful Trelawny Multi-Purpose Stadium pitch.

Munaf Patel was the most successful Indian bowler with four wickets for 10 runs from six overs, Irfan Pathan collected three for 25 in six overs, and Zaheer Khan snared two for 22 from six overs.

Only three West Indies batsmen got into double-figures after the hosts chose to bat -- captain Brian Lara top-scored with 22, and Rammasesh Sarwan and Dwayne Smith both hit 13.

Lara was furious with his team's collapse.

"I am very disappointed, no-one in the dressing room is very happy," he said.

"We need to bat a lot more professionally if we are to win this tournament."

West Indies were in trouble from as early as the fourth over, when Shivnarine Chanderpaul was caught behind down the leg-side

SEE PAGE 18 COL 4



PHOTO: AFP

India paceman Munaf Patel (L) is delighted after taking the wicket of West Indies batsman Dwayne Smith during the WC warm-up match in Trelawny on Friday.

BD A play third match today

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh A play the third and final one-dayer against visiting England A only to restore some pride at the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium.

The last match of the three-match series turned into a mere formality after the touring side confirmed the series victory by winning the first two games. Tushar Imran's second string Bangladesh side lost the first game by five wickets at Bogra and then suffered a six-wicket defeat at Mirpur.

The second string England side also clinched the two-match Test (4-day) series 1-0.

Bookies working overtime

AFP, Colombo

The first ball of the World Cup has not yet been bowled, but a virtual tournament is already in full swing, with the online gaming industry betting Australia will lift the title for a third successive time.

Having clinched the last two trophies, bookmakers are tipping the Aussies to win with odds of 9/2, followed by South Africa 7/1, Sri Lanka 8/5/1 and India 9/1.

Weaker teams such as Zimbabwe are 500/1, Kenya, 750/1 and Scotland at 1500/1.

The online gaming industry agrees that this year's tournament is the most competitive, with many of the top teams peaking at the right time.

"Australia's form has been abysmal in the last few games...but they still remain our favourites to win in the Caribbean," sportingbet.com advises.

The West Indies open the 2007 World Cup against Pakistan in Jamaica on Tuesday, but bookies rightly remind punters that a host nation has never lifted the trophy.

The Cup has been jinxed for the hosts ever since the competition started in England in 1975.

"Much is written of the mysterious 'home advantage' factor, and punters and bookies alike allow some sway for this," says readabet.com which claims South Africa, packed with all-rounders, could also tip the scales.

"Skipper Graeme Smith at the top of the order is arguably the best opener in the game, in fine form and is one of the best skippers, whilst AB de Villiers, Jacques Kallis and Herschelle Gibbs are all formidable in the top to middle order."

For the Cup's top hitters of sixes, West Indian Chris Gayle and Sri Lankan Sanath Jayasuriya tie with odds of 9/1, followed by Australia's Adam Gilchrist, England's Kevin Pietersen, and Indian wicket keeper M.S. Dhoni who equally have odds of 10/1.

With odds of 9/2, Kallis is the favourite all rounder, while Gilchrist, with odds of 2/1, is tipped to be the best wicketkeeper.

Incidentally, Gilchrist, Gayle and Jayasuriya are also favourites to score the fastest 100 in the tournament with odds of 10/1.

Sri Lanka's Muttiah Muralidaran shares the tournament's favourite bowler slot with the Proteas' Makhaya Ntini and New Zealand paceman Shane Bond with odds of 12/1.

Bookmakers predict debutants

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5

Yousuf strikes for Ctg Mohammedan



OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chittagong

Dhaka where they lost the match by 2-1 but asserted the message to the giants that they are to make an impression.

Chittagong Mohammedan success in their second game maintained the home side's supremacy in the first-ever professional league.

The shocking defeat saw star-studded Muktijoddha remain at one point after their goalless draw in the B. League when they stunned Dhaka giants Muktijoddha Sangsads with a solitary goal victory at the MA Aziz Stadium here yesterday.

Mohammad Yousuf netted the all-important goal for the home side in the 53rd minute when the young striker produced an angular left-foot shot from the top of the box after receiving a pass from Guinean Muktijoddha custodian Titumir gripped it comfortably.

On the other hand, Muktijoddha missed their first attempt in the 18th minute when Saifur Rahman fired

after receiving the ball from Alfaaz Ahmed but Titu's diving attempt salvaged the home team.

Experienced midfielder Matiur Munna then got a good chance to level the score in the 68th minute but he failed to tap the ball in an open net.

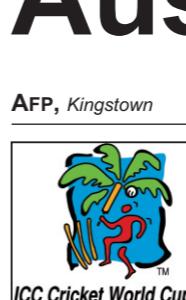
TEAMS

MOHAMMEDAN: Titu, Saykot, Shohel, Israfil, Tareq, Asif Yusuf, Zahid, Shah Alam (Pavel), Dipu, (Tawhid), Yusuf (Anis) and Camara Saifoullay.

MUKTIJODDAH: Titumir, Rajani, Ghansa (Maruf), Hasan Al Mamun, Mostafa Anwar Parvez (Al Arman), Motiur Munna, Arman, Brahim Bouzib, Saifur Rahman Moni, Alfaaz (Kanchan) and Deen Mohammed.

Referee: Azad Rahman.

AFP, Kingstown



Adam Gilchrist's 72 was the centrepiece of Australia's successful run-chase during a five-wicket victory against England in the teams' final World Cup warm-up match here Friday.

Left-hander Gilchrist, back from paternity leave, put on 140 with fellow opener Shane Watson (55) as reigning world champions Australia, chasing 198 for victory, finished on 200 for five with more than nine overs to spare.

Victory meant Australia had ended a three-match losing streak against England in one-dayers.

"It was nice to spend some time in the middle and to get 20 overs in the field," said England skipper Michael Vaughan who has been plagued by a hamstring injury.

"I'm disappointed with our performance. Australia put the squeeze on. We should have got 250-260 but we were well beaten by a good

seamer's first three overs costing 25 runs.

England opted to utilise the tournament rule allowing 13 players per side in warm-ups to have a look at all their bowlers but may not have been much the wiser about the make-up of their attack after this match.