

Chittagong awaits

Cricket

MOHAMMAD ISAM from Chittagong

Cricket fans in Chittagong are awaiting the arrival of the Bangladesh team with open arms.

The Tigers will play the third one-day international on May 15 and the first Test, starting on May 18, at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium against the touring Indian team.

Although the previous visit of India here in 2004 created enormous interest because of its possession of a host of stars, fans in the port city this time are more excited

Umpires for India series

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) on Wednesday revealed the list of officials for the two-match Test and three-match one-day series against India.

Sri Lankan Asoka de Silva has been named as the neutral field umpire for the one-day series with whom local umpire Nadir Shah will officiate the first match on May 10 (Mirpur). Enamul Haque stands for

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about their own stars like Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and Mohammad Ashraful after Bangladesh's impressive showing during the World Cup where they stunned India by five wickets and then thrashed South Africa by 67 runs in the second round.

"Ashraful and Mashrafe played so well at the World Cup. I just want them to give us something similar here in Chittagong and we can win just like we beat them in Trinidad (on March 17)," said Shahidul, a college student.

The locals are indeed quite excited to see the Tigers in their hometown after their cakewalk victory against Scotland four months ago. Local boy Aftab Ahmed was in good touch that day in December but his form off late has meant that the people are looking at the likes of Ashraful and Mashrafe.

"But Aftab and Tamim (Iqbal) will remain in our hearts and we hope they also do well," quipped Shahid.

"People come here and ask us when the teams will arrive. I think it is more to do with the Bangladesh team's World Cup show than anything else," said pitch curator Shafiqul Alam Belal, who is working round the clock to make sure the wicket offers more to the bat.

"The National League matches played here saw a lot of runs, especially off the faster bowlers. The wicket (for the one-day) will provide similar assistance to the batsmen,"

said Belal.

"The spinners, especially, will find the pitch working for them later in the day."

The wicket, on the western side of the ground towards the sea, is still being untouched.

Practice facilities for both sides have been revamped with the addition of the indoor venue built within the compound.

The facilities boast three synthetic turfs, much like the one in Mirpur where the first two ODIs and the second Test will be played.

The only concern for Belal was weather.

"We are not sure if there will be rain during the matches or even before. So we won't leave anything to chance as we have laid the three turfs just a few days ago," said the bespectacled Belal.

The season that is famous for violent storms hasn't lived up to its reputation but locals expect some rain within the next two weeks. But nothing should be taken for granted and if it remains as it is now, the two sides should be looking forward to a very hot summer out in the middle. But as for the ground itself, the slope is quite pronounced and a bout of rain won't hurt the outfield.

"The dressing-rooms, press box, VIP areas have all been set up, keeping in mind that there will be more in attendance this time," said Belal.



Finishing touches being put in the Chittagong Divisional Stadium on Wednesday for the upcoming ODI against India on May 15.

PHOTO: STAR

Tigers begin preparation today

Cricket

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA from Kolkata

The national cricketers will be back to business today in Mirpur after seven days of welcome break to prepare for this month's home series against India.

The selectors have already announced a 14-member team for the three-match one-day series, which will kick off on May 10 at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium, by keeping faith on the World Cup squad.

It would be the Tigers' last assignment under the guidance of coach Dav Whatmore, who parts with the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) after this series following his four-year association. The series has already got special attention after Bangladesh's impressive show in the Caribbean, especially their stunning five-wicket win over India that knocked out the regional giants of the competition.

Having spent two months and seven days in the West Indies, Habibul Bashar's men returned home on April 26 to rest after continuous cricket.

Although the leisure looked brief for the cricketers, captain Bashar, who is all set to quit one-day cricket after this series, said that fatigue would not be an issue.

"Yes all the players were tired after the lengthy trip, especially the long air journey was too boring for us. But I think seven days' rest is enough to recover. We have only a week in our hand to prepare for the series, so there is no scope to extend the break," he said.

The Bangladesh cricket team, which had a three-day training session in Barbados after completion of the second round of the World Cup, will go through an extensive fitness, net and fielding session on the first day at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium.

Tendulkar fell awkwardly while tackling a bouncer from Sreesanth during practice in the afternoon at Eden Gardens and an ice pack was applied immediately to his ankle. The master batsman was attended to by team physio John Gloster on the field and limped out to the dressing room after some initial treatment.

No MRI scans or X-rays have been recommended at this point and his condition will be monitored for the next 24 hours.

He should have sufficient time to recover, given that he's been rested for the three one-dayers which precede the Tests. The first Test begins at Chittagong on May 18.

India focus on F's

Cricket

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA from Kolkata

As the Indian cricket team began a five-day conditioning camp here today in the run up to the tour of Bangladesh, fitness and fielding would be key areas of stress.

In normal circumstances, a series against Bangladesh would have been considered an easy proposition but after the Tigers' victory over South Africa and India in the recent World Cup in the West Indies has changed such a projection.

Indian team's administrative manager Surendra Bhavani told reporters here that there would be general fitness sessions and not rigorous ones.

The Indian team began the conditioning camp, to be held in two sessions every day, under the watchful eyes of manager Ravi Shastri, bowling coach Venkatesh Prasad and fielding coach Robin Singh.

It remains to be seen how Ravi Shastri, a former all-rounder, conducts the team's strategy as he is generally known to be close to the line of thinking of former Indian coach Greg Chappell who had emphasized on fitness and use of young blood. While fielding and fitness training would be held in morning session, batting and

bowling in the afternoon, apart from time in the gym.

The Indian team will be undoubtedly under pressure to do well in Bangladesh as it is reeling under severe criticism at home for its debacle in the World Cup, which is compounded by controversy over players' contracts with the Cricket Board and curbs on commercial endorsements.

The Indian team's early exit from the World Cup led to resignation of Chappell and prompted the cricket board to ask national selectors to emphasize on young talents for the tour of Bangladesh after the veterans like Sachin Tendulkar and Virender Sehwag failed in the Caribbean.

The selectors dropped Sachin and Sourav Ganguly from the team for the limited over series in Bangladesh and dropped Harbhajan Singh, Ajit Agarkar, Irfan Pathan from both ODI and Test teams.

Batsman Majid Ali of Bengal is the sole new face in the 15-member Indian team for the ODI series in Bangladesh while spinners Piyush Chawla, Ramesh Powar, Delhi's opening batsman Gautam Gambhir and R P Singh have been recalled to the teams.

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In the individual rankings also,

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Bangladesh topple India, Pakistan

PRI, New Delhi

Indian team hit a new low by slipping below Bangladesh to be placed ninth in the latest Maruti Suzuki Cricket Ratings issued by ESPN STAR Sports.

India, who had lost to their subcontinental neighbours Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, in the preliminary rounds of the World Cup, were just ahead of Kenya who are placed 10th.

Giants killers Bangladesh, who advanced to the second round of the premier event and defeated top-ranked South Africa, have been positioned two places above at seventh in the list.

The four semi-finalists -- Australia, South Africa, Sri Lanka and New Zealand -- have secured the top positions in that order.

Australia leads ODI teams chart with 98 points and South Africa follows at number two with 92 points. World Cup finalists Sri Lanka are at number three with 82 points and the Kiwis with 73 points are at number four spot.

England is at number five with 62 points, West Indies (59 points) is at number six followed by Bangladesh (42 points), Pakistan (40 points) and India (38 points). Kenya with 14 points completes the top 10 ranking.

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Khulna Abahani upset Dhaka namesake



SPORTS REPORTER

Lack of killer instinct cost Abahani their maiden defeat in the B. League when the Dhaka giants crashed 2-1 to unfancied Khulna Abahani yesterday.

Diego Cruciani's side looked set to take full three points and stand atop the table after Argentine midfielder Mariano Sanchez's sublime strike in the first half at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

But Rezaul Hakim's Pilu's equaliser after a defensive error left the sky-blues heartbroken before

GM Mamun rubbed salt into their wounds with a late strike after a goal by goalkeeper Biplob.

The come-back-from-behind win, Khulna Abahani's second upset in the capital after a 2-2 defeat of Brothers Union, gave the less illustrious Abahani from the

south their overall third victory in eight games and pushed their collection to 10 points.

The Dhakamondi outfit on the other hand, dented their title chase after a seven match unbeaten run, remaining third with 15 points.

The sky-blues' habit of dominating teams without killing them off has been a recurring problem this season and, once again, they showed that they are yet to find a killer instinct.

With Ghanaian forward Ibrahim showing great deftness in an inspirational first half, a blue tide swelled near the Khulna Abahani goal but the top-budgeted team of the year fluffed a half-dozen sitters in the first 25 minutes.

Ibrahim, who found the

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Dhaka Abahani players sit shell-shocked following their reverse to Khulna Abahani in their B. League encounter at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

No 'no-confidence' motion for now

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

The Board of Control of Cricket in India has no immediate plans to table a no-confidence motion against the International Cricket Council, contrary to reports appearing in the media.

"There is no question of any individual deciding on an action like this," a top BCCI official, who just returned from the West Indies, told Cricinfo. "A no-confidence motion is a serious issue and before we take any action like this it has to be discussed within the BCCI and also among other nation members to see if there is some sort of consensus."

The buzz that the BCCI would table a no-confidence motion against the ICC has been doing the round since Niranjan Shah, the secretary of the Indian board, made statements to this effect - which he subsequently denied - while still in the West Indies, shortly after the final. Shah was quoted by The Sydney Morning Herald as saying, "Some of it [a decision on the no confidence motion] will depend on how other boards are feeling. It is fair to say that there are quite a few things to sort out at the next chief executives' meeting."

However, it is understood that the BCCI believes that the ICC is unhappy with several aspects of the ICC's functioning. "See, the job which five people used to do, in an honorary capacity, now

some hundred people do, as paid professionals. If that is the case then the results should also be different," said a BCCI official who had witnessed first-hand the chaos and confusion that engulfed the dying moments of the World Cup final. "Even in domestic cricket you can't imagine a match being played after the streetlights have come on. How come all those professional people in the ICC could not make the right decision at the time?"

The BCCI believes that the ICC has become too bureaucratic in its functioning, and that too many people are involved in taking any decision. It is the BCCI's contention that the fiasco of the last

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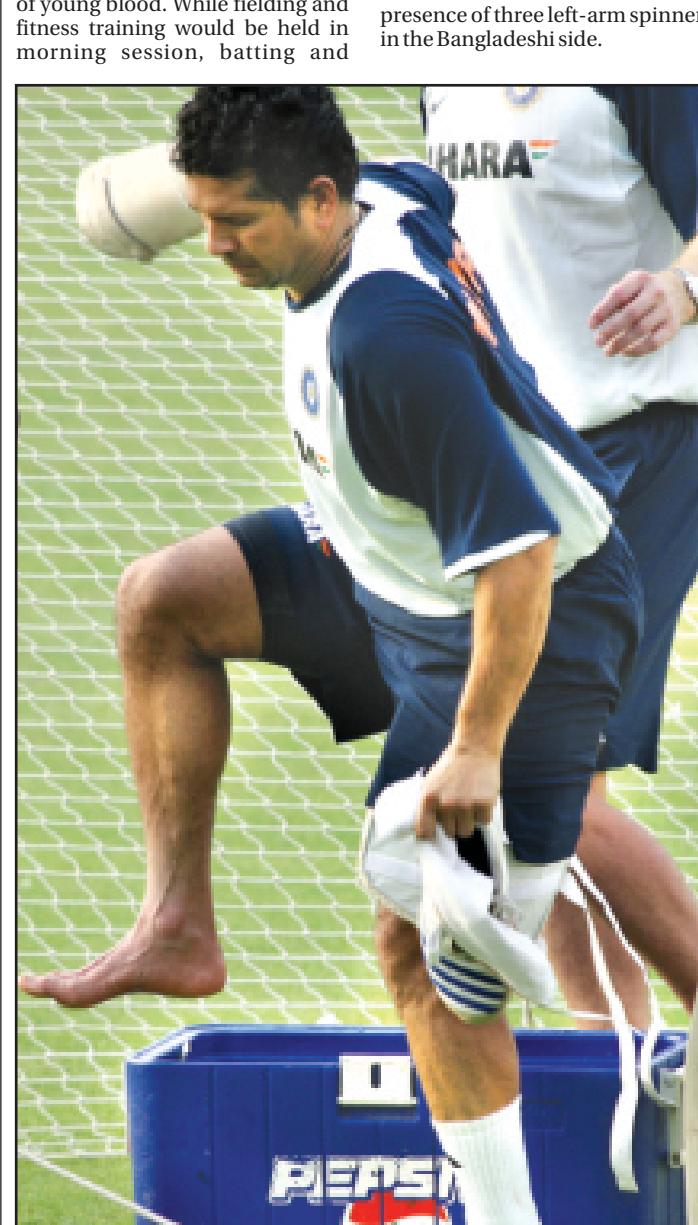


PHOTO: AFP
Indian batsman Sachin Tendulkar extracts his right leg from an ice bath after sustaining an ankle injury during the first day of the five-day conditioning camp at Eden Gardens in Kolkata on Wednesday.

Boost Power Cup from tomorrow

SPORTS REPORTER

The Boost Power Cup under-13 cricket tournament will kick off tomorrow at the Kalabagan Krira Chakra ground.

Former national skipper Minhajul Abedin will inaugurate the meet as chief guest while national vice-captain Mohammad Ashraful and pace spearhead Mashrafe Bin Mortaza will also be present at the opening ceremony.

Twenty top teams from different schools and cricket academies in Dhaka split into four groups will take part in the round-robin league competition.

In connection with the tournament, officials from GSK, Grey Worldwide and hosts Kalabagan Krira Chakra met with the press yesterday at the club tent.