



WELCOME YOU ALL: (From L-R) Indian trio of captain Rahul Dravid, middle-order batsman Yuvraj Singh and seamer Zaheer Khan prepare to board the team bus after arriving in Dhaka. Following closely is swashbuckling wicket-keeper batsman Mahendra Dhoni while master-blower opener Virender Sehwag waves a bouquet of flowers to his admiring fans at the ZIA yesterday.



Did U Know?

Former New Zealand captain Martin Crowe would always tie the pad on his left leg first. He thought that brought him luck.



Matthew Hayden
(Australia's opening batsman)
"This week she's due and she's hung on."
While appreciating that his wife didn't give birth until he got home from the World Cup.

India promise 'hard, hard cricket'

BISHWAJIT ROY



Indian captain Rahul Dravid and new cricket manager Ravi Shastri were in contrasting moods while making on-arrival remarks yesterday over the Bangladesh series, which has got special attention following the visitors' five-wicket defeat against the Tigers in the just concluded World Cup.

Is it a revenge mission? As usual, a very polite answer came from the 34-year old skipper as he replied: "I don't really believe in revenge or revenge series or something like that. There is no place for it in our book. What there is, is a place to show your potential and play really, very good cricket and I think that's what we are looking to do here."

But everybody could understand how the Caribbean setback against Habibul Bashar's men has been haunting them after a vehement comment by former captain and all-rounder Shastri, who heard all those soft words of Dravid sitting beside him at the mini press conference at the Zia International Airport lounge and came out to make clear his

team's intentions. "Can I smile?" was his first reaction before the elaboration, "We know how well Bangladesh played in the World Cup but there is a very clear message for them that we came here to play hard, hard cricket, a kind of cricket that should give a lot of enjoyment to millions of fans who not only enjoy the game but also love it. And of course it would be a good entertainment."

India came to play the one-day series with a new-look side as master batsman Sachin Tendulkar and Sourav Ganguly, two popular names, miss the party but Dravid showed no interest to talk about their omissions. "I think we are very confident with the team we have and there are a lot of experience players in the team as well as some very talented guys. We are happy with the kind of players we have and set to do very well," he responded by dismissing the notion that the team has lack of experience.

One of finest batsmen in the world, who has the experiences of playing 107 Tests and 313 ODIs, Dravid also assured that they have gathered adequate knowledge about the Bangladeshi players.

"There were a lot of young players in the Bangladesh team that we hadn't seen much of (before the

World Cup). Now we have a lot more first-hand knowledge about some of their better players. We played each other and saw them on TV and I think it would make a good effect in the series," said Dravid, whose side were stunned by the assault of an unknown left-hand opener Tamim Iqbal in their World Cup match against Bangladesh.

Dravid also said that his boys are ready to take the challenge against the Bangladeshi left-arm spin trio.

"They (Mohammad Rafique, Abdur Razzak and Shakib Al Hasan) bowled well in the World Cup but I am not sure about the condition here. We got some good players of spin and there are some spinners also in the side, so it would be a good contest," he said.

The Indian captain dismissed fears that the sweltering heat could be an issue during the three-match one-day and two-match Test series.

"The weather is the same for both teams and a lot of our players endure similar conditions in India. It is not that we are coming from somewhere where the weather is very different from here, so I don't think it's really an issue for us. Actually we are used to this kind of condition. We had a good camp in Kolkata, the boys really acclimatised well," he explained.

Tickets go slow

SPORTS REPORTER

Despite huge enthusiasm about Bangladesh's coming home series against India, the first day's response of ticket selling was not satisfactory.

Only thirty percent tickets have been sold for the first match to be held at the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium on May 10.

"Tickets at Mirpur and Imamganj branches of the AB Bank have been sold out but so far, we have been informed of a total of thirty percent tickets sells on the first day," informed Ali Hossain, member secretary of Bangladesh Cricket Board's ticket and seating committee.

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Murali has no retirement plan

BBC ONLINE, undated

Sri Lanka spinner Muttiah Muralidaran said he intended to play Test and one-day cricket for at least another two years.

The 35-year-old, who received a runners-up medal at the World Cup, said he had no intention of retiring.

He said: "I will have to call it a day some time. But I am hoping to play for at least another two years and see how good it is and how my fitness is."

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Consistency on his mind

SPORTS REPORTER



Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium. He was a run-out victim.

"It would be nice if this run out ultimately appears to be the only bad luck for me this month," Ashraf said smilingly.

No doubt Bangladesh played as a unit in their recent success stories but still there are some individuals like Ashraf who always come under spotlight ahead of any tournament or series and there is no exception this time in the home battle against India.

Ashraf has lightened up the cricket world with masterful knocks on several occasions. But the problem is that 'his day' doesn't come as often as expected from a batsman of his calibre. That is why it is hard to predict anything about the demanding series.

The 22-year old right-hander showed signs of consistency during the World Cup in the West Indies including hitting a brilliant 87-run match-winning knock against South Africa but whether he can carry the form to enhance his reputation in the series remains a big question.

Interestingly, the new Bangladesh vice-captain was not ready to focus

only on the individual goal rather he was looking forward to continue the impressive World Cup show as a team to push the Indians hard.

"It's not a question of whether I will do something special rather how much I contribute in my team's victory. We are all looking forward to the series. We are charged up and if we play as per our potential then nothing



MOHAMMAD ASHRAFUL

is impossible," said an excited Ashraf while talking to the Daily Star.

"Bangladesh have won a number of matches in last year without any major contribution from me," he reminded.

But he was fully conscious about his challenge in the series as the focus will be on him not only as a batsman but also as the future Tigers captain.

"I have some good innings at home but the overall record is not good in comparison with my performances on foreign soil. The home pressure might be a reason. This time the expectation would be high, especially when I am going to start the series as vice-captain. But I am ready to take the challenge," said a confident Ashraf.

The young man, however, was concerned about his poor average.

"My batting average (21.97) has improved a bit after the World Cup but still, it is far behind standard. I am not consistent with the bat and that's why people sometimes treated me too harshly. I am now more matured," said Ashraf, who is going to make his 100th ODI appearance when Bangladesh play the first one-day against India on May 10.

But he issued warning that he will try his best to occupy the crease as much time as possible.

"My main objective is to settle first before going for shots. If I can concentrate on this then I will definitely be successful. I will first try to concentrate on singles and build my innings," said Ashraf adding that he will try to avoid the mistakes he had done in his last few matches.

While talking on his improvised scoop-paddle that he successfully used to frustrate the South Africans, he said that he could well do that again once settled in the middle.

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Oldham youths in town



SPORTS REPORTER

The young footballers of Oldham Athletic, who arrived in Dhaka yesterday to play three exhibition matches, will have to deal with a very hot summer during their stay in Bangladesh.

The under-20 side from England's century-old club will begin their campaign today when they meet local giants Mohammedan Sporting Club at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

They will face the Bangladesh U-23s in Sylhet on May 10 and return to Dhaka for the last match against Abahani on May 12.

The two matches to be held in the capital will be telecast live by satellite channel ATN Bangla.

Apart from playing, the Latics will also be involved in promotional work with local players. It is likely that a number of Bangladeshi youngsters would be selected to visit the UK for further intensive training at a future date.

The club's CEO Alan Hardy

informed at a press conference at BFF Bhawan yesterday afternoon that they have brought a number of coaches among the 18 officials.

The coaches will work with players to test their skill as well as local coaches to exchange modern technique. The programme will be held at BKSP tomorrow.

Players with satisfactory skills could well be trained at the Oldham Academy.

Although team captain Mike Pearson expressed his worries about the weather, coach Tony Philliskirk was confident that the local conditions would not reduce the team's performance.

"My players are professionals. Professionals are built for all conditions, so the heat won't be a problem," said Philliskirk.

He also said that six of his players have already played for the Latics senior team in the Coca Cola League 1, the third highest ranked league in England after Premiership and the Championship.

"It would be a valuable experience for the boys to play in these difficult conditions," told the coach adding that goalkeeper Ryan Smith has made most appearances for the senior side among the party to

comer here.

"We will play positive football against Bangladesh," said captain Pearson, a central defender.

He said that they are looking forward to win all three friendly matches they have a fair chance to do that as they have some talented booters.

"But the local weather is very hot, which may create some bad impact on our performance," said Pearson who admitted that he and his teammates were completely in the dark about Bangladesh football.

With most of the Bangladesh Football Federation out of town to join the Asian Football Confederation Congress in Kuala Lumpur, the federation held a rather poor show in arranging the press conference. BFF senior vice president Monir Ahmed was present.

Oldham, who crashed 2-0 to Championship (First Division) side Wolves in the FA Cup third round this year, were part of the inaugural Premiership season in 1992-93 and

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Players of English League Two side Oldham Athletic on their arrival at the ZIA yesterday morning.

PHOTO: STAR

Lanka cry foul over Gilly play

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka believes Adam Gilchrist's use of a squash ball as a batting aid in the World Cup final was "unethical" and may take the matter up with world cricket chiefs, officials said Monday.

Gilchrist, whose record-breaking 149 led Australia to their fourth title, said later that he had a squash ball in one of his gloves to give him a better grip.

"I had a squash ball in my bottom-hand to help with my grip in training and I decided in this World Cup to use it in a match," he said.

The revelation caused uproar here, with Sri Lanka Cricket secretary Kangadaran Mathivanan saying the matter could be taken up during next month's International Cricket Council (ICC) annual general meeting.

"We are of the opinion that it was unethical for Gilchrist to use a squash ball to give unfair advantage," Mathivanan told AFP.

He said Sri Lanka could call on the ICC's cricket committee for

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What to WATCH

ESPN

Sultan Azlan Shah Cup Hockey
Canada v Pakistan
Live at 4:00 pm
Korea v Malaysia
Live at 6:00 pm
ATN BANGLA
Mohammedan v Oldham Athletic
Live at 5:00 pm

DAY'S EVENT

B.League
Ctg Abahani v Farashganj
Venue: MA Aziz Stadium
Time: 3:45 pm
Mohammedan v Oldham Athletic
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium
Time: 5:00 pm