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PHOTO: STAR
Bangladesh cricketers run on what could have been the fifth and final day of the first Test at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. The Tigers lost the first Test against South Africa on the fourth morning on Monday.

Missing a 4th bowler

BISHWAJIT ROY



The inclusion of another specialist bowler in the team might not have made any difference in the ultimate outcome of the first Test against South Africa on Monday.

Bangladesh lost the match by five wickets on the fourth morning at the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium.

But the team management's strategy to field three specialist bowlers -- Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Shahadat Hossain and Mohammad Rafique -- has raised many questions to answer.

The home team's intention was very clear: they wanted to prolong the batting line-up as much as they could. But the question is that, was there any significant upshot in the batting? The answer is definitely negative as scores of 192 and 182 hardly portrayed the team's improvement and if the Tigers earned anything from the Test, it was because of a special bowling effort from Shahadat Hossain, who claimed nine wickets in the match.

It could have been a different story if leading paceman Mashrafe could contribute something with the new ball rather he was

wicketless in the game. And captain Mohammad Ashraful was helpless to use any other option especially in the initial stages of the South Africa second innings where they defended a little over 200 runs.

The main point is that it was too defensive and a conservative idea to concentrate only on the batting after spending more than seven years in the Test fold.

Without any doubt, Jamie Siddons's prime concern is with his brittle batting but he should understand that the improved batting from his top-order batsmen is the only solution of the paramount headache.

Former chief selector, Faruque Ahmed also branded it as a negative idea to field three specialist bowlers in a Test match.

"I can remember that during my tenure I had to face the question a few times when we played five specialist bowlers. The question was why we always went for four bowlers and interestingly now the question raised is why three bowlers," said the former national skipper smilingly.

"Undoubtedly we played a good Test match in Mirpur against South Africa and Shahadat (Hossain) bowled brilliantly apart from Mohammad Rafique's spin. But I must say it's a negative idea to

play three specialist bowlers. You can do it in one-day matches sometimes, but not in Test.

"If you go with three bowlers it means you start the match with a negative frame of mind. I don't think we are in such a stage to think like that and I firmly believe that it will always take you to the back foot," he explained.

The incumbent chief selector Rafiqul Alam however dismissed the opinion that they played the match with three bowlers as he considered Shakib Al Hasan as a specialist option.

"Definitely he (Shakib) is a specialist left-arm spinner, so you can't say that we played with three specialist bowlers. The unfortunate thing was that Shakib could not give his hundred per cent because he suffered a slight injury in his spin finger in the early stages of the match" Rafiq defended.

"And one should understand that we have to emphasise on our batting first. Just think that the result could have been worse had Aftab (Ahmed) and Shakib not scored some runs. And what's wrong in playing four bowlers when a team like India can practice it," he added.

But whatever the explanation of Rafiq, we should let the Tigers grow up rather than hold them back.

BOWLING RANKINGS Steyn and Shahadat move up

AFP, Dhaka

South African paceman Dale Steyn was fast closing in on number one Test bowler Muttiah Muralidaran after an impressive performance in the opening Test against Bangladesh here.

Steyn picked up 38 valuable ratings points in the first Test, which his team won by five wickets on Monday, and is now just 37 behind the Sri Lankan spin wizard, according to the official rankings released Tuesday.

The 24-year-old, who sits in second place, also consolidated his position as the highest rated paceman, with 870 points and is closing rapidly on the magic 900, a level that has been achieved by only a few among the current crop.

He took 13 Tests to reach his first 50 wickets but made 47 dismissals in his next six outings, giving him an average of eight per match.

Steyn's latest Test saw him walk off with seven wickets on a pitch that offered no assistance. And he goes into Friday's second match at Chittagong needing just two wickets to reach 100 Test dismissals in only his 20th match.

Youngsters Morne Morkel of South Africa and Shahadat Hossain of Bangladesh were the other big movers in the bowling list, released by the International Cricket Council.

The 22-year-old Hossain, playing his 14th Test, took nine wickets to jump 12 places into 38th while Morkel, who took 5-50 in the first innings, rocketed 24 places to 63rd.

Morkel was playing only his second Test after making his debut against India in December 2006.

Ratings for bowlers are calculated by taking into account various factors.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5

Premier league from March 1

SPORTS REPORTER

Holders Abahani face a formidable Surjo Tarun side on the opening day of the Premier Cricket League that begins at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur on March 1.

Bangladesh Cricket Board yesterday announced the fixture of the 12-team competition, that is jewel in the domestic cricket crown.

In the other opening day matches, runners-up Mohammedan face BKSP at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium while third-placed finishers Sonargaon Cricketers take on relegation survivors City Club.

On the second day, Old DOHS face Young Pegasus, Partex are up against Bangladesh Biman while Victoria take on Kalabagan in different grounds in the city.

Four grounds Fatullah, BKSP 1 and 2 and the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium will be used for the league while the Mirpur ground will hold the opening encounter.

Hayden fans the flames

CRICINFO, undated

Matthew Hayden has stirred already troubled waters by calling Harbhajan Singh an "obnoxious weed", a comment that will only serve to further deepen the animosity between the two sides which has surfaced during India's current tour.

Speaking on a Brisbane radio station, Hayden said: "It's been a bit of a long battle with Harbhajan, the first time I ever met him he was the same little obnoxious weed that he is now. His record speaks for itself in cricket."

"There is a certain line that you can kind of go to and then you know where you push it and he just pushes it all the time. That's why he

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5



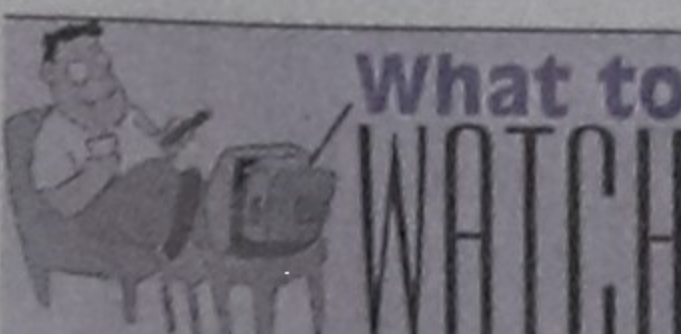
Did U Know?

Wimbledon has two show courts -- the Centre Court which holds 13,800 spectators and the Number 1 Court which has a capacity of 11,400.



Shane Warne

(Australian leg-spin legend)
"I won't tell you what my first impression was."
Saying with a smile when asked about playing alongside his favourite foe, South Africa captain Graeme Smith, in the Indian Premier League.



ESPN
Sportscenter India
Sports News
Live at 8:30pm
STAR Sports
Middlesbrough v Sheffield United
FA Cup, Round 5 Replay
Live from 2:00am (Thursday)

Lankans blown away India set up finals with Australia

AFP, Hobart



India claimed a spot in the tri-series finals with a crushing seven-wicket win over Sri Lanka in their one-day match here on Tuesday.

A spectacular middle-order collapse saw Sri Lanka make just 179 from 47.1 overs and India had few problems reaching the target in 32.2 overs, scoring 180 for three.

Although Sri Lanka still have one game remaining in the series, against Australia on Friday, they cannot reach the finals and it has been a disappointing tournament for last year's World Cup finalists.

Sri Lankan captain Mahela Jayawardene said his team simply hadn't played well enough throughout the series, with just one win from seven matches.

"We don't deserve to be in the finals because we haven't been consistent in this tournament, simple as that," he said.

Indian captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni said he was hopeful his team were peaking at the right time.

"I think we've improved a lot," said Dhoni.

"Still we are not at our best, we can be a better side overall when it comes to batting, bowling and fielding."

"You can expect a bit more from the side but it depends on lots of other things."

Importantly for India, star batsman Sachin Tendulkar burst out of his form slump ahead of the finals against Australia with his first half-century of the series.

Tendulkar was back to his brilliant best as he punished the bowlers, hitting three successive boundaries off seamer Ishara Amerasinghe in making 63 from 54 balls, including 10 fours.

Gautam Gambhir continued his impressive form with an unbeaten 63, while Yuvraj Singh looked dangerous with a rapid 36.

Sri Lanka had appeared to be cruising towards a big total at 72 for one after being sent in to bat, with veteran opener Sanath Jayasuriya back in some touch and Kumar Sangakkara continuing his good form.

However, Sangakkara's dismissal for 33, caught behind by Dhoni from the bowling of the recalled Praveen Kumar, sparked a destructive collapse.

Sri Lanka lost 6-21 in just over 11 overs to slump to 93 for seven.

Kumar, who was named man of

the match, and teenage paceman Ishant Sharma did most of the damage, claiming four wickets apiece.

Sharma again impressed with 4-41, while Kumar, playing just his second game of the series, grabbed three wickets in as many overs to tear the heart out of the Sri Lankan batting and finish with 4-31.

The teenager has 13 wickets in the tri-series at 19.46.

Sangakkara was quickly followed back to the pavilion by Jayawardene, caught by Rohit Sharma from the bowling of Kumar for just three.

With the skipper gone, the innings quickly fell apart.

Chamara Silva's struggles continued when he fell for a duck and Jayasuriya then threw his wicket away when he top edged an attempted pull from the bowling of Irfan Pathan on 34.

Tillekeratne Dilshan made just eight and Chaminda Vaas played a poor shot to fall to Sharma for a duck.

It was then left to Chamara Kapugedera and tail-enders Lasith Malinga to add some respectability to the innings, the pair putting on 46 before the latter became Sharma's fourth victim.

Kapugedera showed rare fight

SEE PAGE 18 COL 2

Crunch T20 ties today

SPORTS REPORTER

Three Group B teams will fight for two semifinal spots when the Premier League Twenty20 competition continues after a six-day break today.

Permutations are aplenty but a win would suffice for either of Surjo Tarun, Victoria or Old DOHS but Victoria's all-win record in the first four group matches put them ahead of the pack. They take on Old DOHS at the main BKSP cricket ground in the afternoon, while in the outer ground, Khaled Mashud's Surjo Tarun face Young Pegasus at the same time. Surjo Tarun and Old DOHS have won three matches each.

Meanwhile, Group A matches hold academic interest although the early morning match at BKSP has the same Abahani-Mohammedan clash's attention. Mohammedan, who lost all four of their matches would be desperate to win. But this must be one of the lowest profile clash between the two giants.

In the other matches, Bangladesh Biman take on BKSP and Partex face Sonargaon Cricketers at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium. City Club round off the day's matches with a game against Kalabagan.

The semifinals will be held at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium tomorrow.



PHOTO: STAR
South Africa pace bowler Makhaya Ntini is busy searching for his desired mobile set at a city shopping mall yesterday.

Another storm brewing?

AGENCIES, undated

Indian captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni on Tuesday accused Australia's Andrew Symonds of provoking young paceman Ishant Sharma in their tri-series clash at the Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG).

The two became embroiled in a set-to when Symonds took offence to the Indian's celebration after he had clean-bowled him, leading Sharma to point the all-rounder towards the pavilion.

The gesture led the 19-year-old bowler to be fined 15 per cent of Sunday's match fee by match referee Jeff Crowe.

But speaking after his side crushed Sri Lanka by seven wickets here on Tuesday to earn a place in the Commonwealth Bank Series finals against Australia, Dhoni echoed the Indian management's earlier claims that Symonds had instigated the incident.

"He only reacted to what Symonds said to him," Dhoni said of Sharma's reaction.

An Indian official confirmed that a complaint had been lodged with Crowe about provocative behaviour of several Australians -- believed to be Symonds, captain Ricky Ponting and Matthew Hayden.

The complaint came in a letter to the match referee after Sunday's match, the Daily Telegraph said.

The newspaper report said the Indians had not ruled out boycotting the upcoming tri-series finals if they qualified to face the Australians.

The Indians had also threatened to boycott the rest of the tour

SEE PAGE 18 COL 2



PHOTO: AFP
BREATHING FIRE: Young India paceman Praveen Kumar, who returned figures of 4-31, sends down yet another delivery during their CB Series match against Sri Lanka at Hobart yesterday.

An over with Steyn

Look all you want but finding a more well-rounded, genial and laidback fast bowler than Dale Steyn will be a tough task. In an exclusive interview with The Daily Star Sport's Quazi Zulquarnain Islam and Mohammad Isam, the steely Steyn speaks of his philosophy on life, interest in photography, adulation for Shaun Pollock and Jose Mourinho's professionalism. Dale Steyn is truly the speedster for the next generation. Following is an excerpt from the lively encounter with the South African at the poolside of the Dhaka Sheraton Hotel:

The Daily Star Sport (DSS): Welcome Dale! How has Bangladesh been for you so far?

Dale Steyn (DS): On the field it has been good. It's nice when you are winning. Off the field we really haven't had much time off. Today is really the first day we have had to relax.

DSS: You started your career in 2004 but you have played only 18 Tests since then. Having now played a few on the trot do you feel you are here to stay?

DS: I really hope so! There are always other guys coming through, other bowlers like Morne Morkel who basically does the same thing as me ... bowls fast. You can never think that your spot is guaranteed. It's good to have pressure from underneath, knowing that there is someone who can take your place.

DSS: You mentioned before the Pakistan tour that Morne's Twenty20 World Cup performance was a 'shock to your system' because it made you feel like your place in the team was not certain...

DS: Actually it might have come out the wrong way. What happened was that, with the form that he (Morne) had, it didn't look like I would get selected. It showed me that you can never ever be certain of your place.

DSS: In the past six months you have taken 49 wickets in 7 Tests. Would you say you are at your peak or can things get better?

DS: (laughs) I don't want to say

there to be broken and I want to carry on doing what I am doing.

DSS: So after the first Test, how much of a gap do you think Bangladesh has with the rest of the world?

DS: (laughs) I don't want to say

They should keep plugging away until they get the results.

DSS: Anyone special in the Bangladesh team?

DS: They are all pretty decent players. But I can't single out someone, getting whose wicket would make me proud.

DSS: You have seen a lot of New Zealand and West Indies, but not much of our batsmen. Did you have a plan on getting them out?

DS: I think generally in cricket, you keep it simple. I don't think it's an easy game but the way you explain it, is pretty easy; like bowl outside the off-stump. But the difficult part is when you have to do that six times in six balls. Try and make a batsman play his B game and not just his A game.

At this level your strength can be your big weakness. 80 to 90 per cent of the time you keep doing it, that's the kind of thing people like Shaun Pollock and Glenn McGrath have kept doing day in day out. That's why they were the best in the world.

DSS: So you like to hit a batsman?

DS: I don't like hitting a batsman. It knocks the winds out of their sails a little bit but it's an ugly thing.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 2