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Bangladesh cricketers play football during their final training session before the second Test against South Africa at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium yesterday.

Runs craved on flat deck

BISHWAJIT ROY from Chittagong

WARID Cricket Series
It was a different scenario in the Bangladesh Test prior to the second Test match against South Africa which starts at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium today.

to bring himself out of the emotion as he said that his team was very focussed on their game and the two emotional issues would hardly make any impact in their performance.

batting and we should show patience if we want to take the game into the fifth day. Right now our main target is to prolong the game as much as we can," he observed.

Former national skipper Habibul Bashar and Mohammad Rafique got special attentions rather than what the Tigers were going to show in the second and final Test after their encouraging show in Mirpur.

"We are all professional players and that's why there is no scope to get emotional with anything. Our main focus is to put on a much better performance in the second Test than the first one," Ashraf said.

Coach Jamie Siddons also echoed his captain's sentiment and said that he would be a happy man if his charges could put up anything above 300 on the board.

Bangladesh captain Mohammad Ashraf was emotional when he announced that they have decided to leave out his predecessor from the 12-member squad and said as well that it would be their last game with long-serving left-arm spinner Rafique.

And the Tigers skipper was excited with the fact that they were going to play on a much better wicket than the mysterious pitch of Mirpur.

"It's a very good wicket; a very, very flat surface. I am not thinking of runs like 500-plus rather I would be happy if my team put up 300-350 runs on the board. We were competitive in the first Test which in my opinion was the most significant outcome from the first Test. I definitely want good efforts from my boys," the Australian, who hardly showed any emotion to the omission of Bashar and the last appearance of Rafique, desired.

"He (Bashar) is the most successful batsman in our country and for the first time in his career he was dropped for his performance. It was a hard decision for us but we have to go with the reality. On the other hand, it is one of our best performer's (Rafique) last match," said an emotion-choked Ashraf in a press briefing at the venue yesterday.

"Bashar was out of form in the last eight Tests so it was obvious for him. It's simple that one should perform to keep his place no matter how big he is," he added.

Ashraf however believe that they can only fulfil their coach's desire if a few of the top-order batsmen come up with something big.

"The ace batsman was quick

And the ace batsman was quick

And the ace batsman was quick

TEAMS
BANGLADESH (from): Mohammad Ashraf (captain), Mashrafe Mortaza, Aftab Ahmed, Shakib Al Hasan, Shahadat Hossain, Tamim Iqbal, Shahriar Nafees, Mohammad Rafique, Mushfiqur Rahim, Junaid Siddique, Rajin Saleh, Abdur Razzak.
SOUTH AFRICA (from): Graeme Smith (captain), Ashwell Prince, Hashim Amla, Johan Botha, Mark Boucher, AB de Villiers, JP Duminy, Neil McKenzie, Robin Peterson, Jacques Kallis, Morne Morkel, Andre Nel, Makhaya Ntini, Dale Steyn.
Umpires: Aleem Dar and Steve Bucknor.



Did U Know?

The boxer with the most fights without suffering a single loss was Hal Bagwell of Great Britain who finished his 10-year career (1938-1948) with 175 wins, 0 losses and 5 draws.



TALK TURKEY



Jay-Jay Okocha

(Former Nigerian star footballer)
"Football for us is like part of our religion, it means more to us than just a game, because so many poor people get unbelievable joy from the players winning a game, it gives them so much pleasure."



What to WATCH

- BTV & Super Sport 2**
Bangladesh v South Africa
Second Test, Day One
Live from 10:00am
- STAR Sports**
Australia v Sri Lanka
CB Series, 12th ODI
Live from 9:15am
- STAR Cricket**
ICC U-19 World Cup
Pakistan v South Africa
Second Semifinal
Live from 12:00pm
- ESPN**
Sportscentre India
Sports News
Live at 8:30pm



Bangladesh v South Africa
Second Test, Day One
Venue: Chittagong Divisional Stadium

CDS needs better drainage

Cricket

SHAHIDUL ISLAM, Chittagong

The met office here yesterday heralded good news for the cricket fans who are eager to watch the Bangladesh-South Africa second Test starting today at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium (CDS) alias Bir Shreshtha Shaheed Ruhul Amin Stadium.

Offering forecast 'initially' for next 24 hours till Friday afternoon, the met officials said the Chittagong-sky would be bright and clear throughout the day.

"There may be fleeting overcast and little dew-factor early in the morning, but there is hardly any possibility of abnormal behaviour of the weather," said Abdul Hai, the duty-forecasting officer of the met office at Patenga yesterday.

The official further hoped any remarkable fluctuation or change of the weather in following days was also very much an unlikely speculation.

It may be mentioned that inclement weather interrupted heavily the last Test match played at the CDS between India and Bangladesh from May 18 to 22, 2007.

Incessant rain coupled with overcast condition had reigned in right from Day One and continued till the fog end of the match, absorbing much of the sessions and giving little scopes to the players to shine. And it would not be worth mentioning to remember the Day Three of that match, which was completely washed out because of wet ground.

And amidst of these unpleasant moments one shouldn't forget the role of poor drainage system that, many in Chittagong believe, was

largely responsible for pushing the match in mire, if not spoilt it eventually.

"We don't have a hand on the nature. But can you imagine anything worse than the fact that man-made mistakes or lack of proper sewerage or drainage system come in the way to keep stranglehold on a cricket match?" they fumed.

Alamgir Mohammad Sirajuddin, a former venue manager of this ground, said when the Tk 35-crore stadium was built on the sprawling 26-acre land the authorities concerned had not considered seriously and properly the drainage system.

"You need to keep certain level (around 20-inches) of slopes right from the centre of the ground up to the receiving end but this important factor was ignored," Alamgir, now the general secretary of

Bashar rules out int'l exit

SPORTS REPORTER from Chittagong

It seems that Bangladesh cricket is all set to enter a new era after the departure of some senior cricketers. Mohammad Rafique has already announced his international retirement, while Khaled Mashud's career is all but finished and the omission of Habibul Bashar from the second Test against South Africa simply enhanced the notion.

But former national skipper Bashar said that he is still far from bidding international cricket bye despite his exclusion due to poor form. The most successful Test batsmen in the country with three hundred and 24 half-centuries, Bashar only missed two Tests against New Zealand in 2004 at home in Bangladesh's previous 52 matches.

The team think-tank took the decision as the most successful Bangladesh skipper only scored 188 runs in his last 16 innings.

"A hard time has come in my career because I was never dropped from the team. But I don't want to finish my career in such a way. I have the confidence that I will be able to come back to bid international cricket goodbye with some respect," said Bashar.

"As there was a valid reason behind the omission, I took the decision sportingly. I have fully respect the management's decision but I am not ready to take the final decision on my career because I am still feeling good," he added. "I can still wake up early and my body doesn't betray me. So, why would I think that everything is finished? I believe that I still have the ability to contribute to my country," said Bashar.

However, he was aware that there is hardly any scope to prove his

Rafique bowls a beamer

SPORTS REPORTER from Chittagong

WARID Cricket Series
Before what is expected to be his last international match, Mohammad

character, something that he has been in his long career. It was not all about a success story but there were also some controversies for which he made headlines for all the wrong reasons.

I had to miss a number of Test matches after the inaugural match against India. I may finish my career with much better record if they didn't spoil me," said Rafique without mentioning any name.

Rafique came up with a typical salvo saying that he had taken the decision of quitting the game because of some incumbent officials at the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB).

Prior to the second Test match between Bangladesh and South Africa, the 37-year-old left-arm spinner, who is just two wickets shy of becoming the first Bangladeshi to reach hundred Test wickets, got special attention during a press conference at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium yesterday as one of the heroes of Bangladesh cricket already announced that it would be his last appearance.

In the special occasion, the veteran spinner portrayed his true

Rafique puzzled everyone for quite sometimes regarding his decision to quit the game but he reconfirmed yesterday that there is no chance this time to reverse his judgment.

The ace spinner expressed his desire earlier that he would bid international game goodbye after the ongoing series against South Africa to create opportunities for the youngsters but the veteran pointed his fingers towards some officials for taking this decision.

"There were definitely some other reasons behind the decision. I am not ready to continue the game at the blessings of those people who destroyed my career in the early stages of my Test career. You know, because of these officials

"I can still continue my game but those people have already returned to power. Have you remembered these people who ignored me by saying that my bowling is not suitable for Tests?" he fumed by recalling his absence from Test cricket for 14 matches after making debut against India at the Bangabandhu National Stadium in 2000.

Rafique also came down hard on the present team think-tank's policy to go with the young players in Test cricket.

"I think they are thinking too much about the young players which is not good," observed the spinner, who already played 32 Tests and 125 one-day internationals

Abahani, City in final

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani won at a canter to enter the semifinal of the Premier Twenty20 tournament when they cruised past Surjo Torun by seven wickets at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium yesterday.

Opting to field first, Abahani restricted the promoted side to 106-7 in 20 overs before riding on Mahbulul Karim's dazzling 65 to win with 2.2 overs to spare.

They will face City Club, who rode on Arafat Salahuddin's sparkling all-round show to beat Victoria Sporting Club by five runs in the second semifinal, in the final that is still not scheduled. City defended their score of 96-8, shutting out Victoria on 91-6 in 20 overs.

rounder Mahmudullah Riyad and wicketkeeper-batman Dhiman Ghosh began the repair work, but both batsmen failed to find boundaries. When they fell after adding 44 for the sixth wicket, City took control (they conceded just four boundaries in the innings) and won the game through some tight bowling.

Arafat, with two wickets and that crucial 38, was adjudged man-of-the-match.

BRIEF SCORES
SURJO TORUN: 106-7 in 20 overs (Shakil 48, Talha 3-21).
ABAHANI: 107-3 in 17.4 overs (Mahbulul 65, Delwar 1-18).
Result: Abahani won by seven wickets.
CITY CLUB: 96-8 in 20 overs (Arafat 38, Enamul 3-16).
VICTORIA: 91-6 in 20 overs (Dhiman 28, Shafaq 2-10).
Result: City won by five runs.

With another 64 required, all-

MSC draw in their IFA opener

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammedan Sporting Club of Dhaka shared points with Kolkata Mohammedan in a goalless draw in their opening match of the 113th IFA Shield at the Salt Lake Stadium in Kolkata yesterday.



TIME HAS COME: Veteran left-arm spinner Mohammad Rafique (R) bares his soul at a press briefing ahead of the second Test, which will be his final appearance for the country, at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium yesterday. Also seen in the picture is Bangladesh captain Mohammad Ashraf.

'Finals begin now'

CRICINFO, undated



Australia will treat Friday's dead-rubber against Sri Lanka as their first final ahead of the best-of-three CB Series deciders with India starting on Sunday. Sri Lanka have only pride to play for but Australia know they cannot afford to lose momentum after winning their past four games of the tournament.

"We've certainly taken the approach that our finals campaign starts now," Gilchrist said in the lead-up to the Sri Lanka match at the MCG. "You could say it would be better not playing the game and have a clear run into the finals and preparation. But we've got this game to use how we want to use it, and it's not as a practice game. If we get lethargic we lose momentum. I'm sure every individual is

looking to have their own specific things. I'm sure Ricky (Ponting) will want to back up now, the runs that he's scored, and Symmo. I've had a few teens, twenties scores since my hundred in Perth, so it would be nice to get a bit of momentum backup."

Australia lost last year's tri-series finals to England and Gilchrist said with he and Brad Hogg farewelling international cricket during the deciders -- and with the CB Series itself on the way out -- it was important the hosts were in form to face India on Sunday. "We don't have that trophy in the cabinet and it's the last tri-series that there will probably ever be," he said.

"It's been an integral part in the success of Australian cricket and the Australian cricket calendar, and indeed the world cricket calendar. Although it's become tired and everyone's ready to move onto a different format this triangular series, when it used to be called the World Series Cup, countries used to covet this trophy and loved to be here."

Mahela Jayawardene's men cannot make the finals following their disappointing run since their win over India in Canberra more than two weeks ago. They have suffered four defeats from that moment on and Jayawardene said their pride was definitely on the line in Melbourne.

"No team wants to lose four-five games in a tournament and not have a successful run," Jayawardene said. "Every game we play, we play to win and give everything. Things haven't gone our way, we have one more chance to rectify those things."

They are unlikely to risk Farveez Maharoof, who has a side strain, while Australia will regain Mitchell Johnson after he was rested for their match in Sydney earlier this week. It will be the last match Gilchrist plays at the MCG and he said as the CB Series had continued

SAFF CHAMPIONSHIP Bangladesh in easy group

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh have drawn Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Bhutan in a rather easier Group B in the SAFF Football Championship, which commences June 3 in Sri Lanka and Maldives.

The matches in Male will be played at the National Stadium while Sugathadasa Stadium has been chosen as the venue in Colombo.

Football Association of Maldives' interim committee chairman Ahmed Shahir and South Asian Football Federation president Ganesh Thapa were on stage to conduct the draws.

The champions will receive US dollars 50,000 and the runners-ups 20,000. The semifinalists will pocket 10,000 dollars each as prize money.

THE DRAW
Group A: Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Bhutan.
Group B: India, Maldives, Pakistan and Nepal.

death' to be played in Male.

The draw of the eight-team meet was held at Paradise Islands Resort in Maldives yesterday in presence of general secretaries of all the federations.

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