

## Tigers on song

SPORTS REPORTER



After a long time, the Tigers were celebrating some success. If the first win against Ireland brought back smile in the Bangladesh camp after a lengthy losing streak since the World Cup last year, securing the series yesterday made them relieved and singing.

Ireland, who had stunned Bangladesh in their World Cup super eights match, wilted under scorching heat in the first match but even the cool breeze following overnight shower hardly changed their performance.

"Bangladesh had plenty of wickets in hand in the last 20 overs when we scored similarly but lost six men. It made the difference," admitted losing coach Phil Simmons at the post-match briefing at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium.

"We are 2-0 behind but the third game is a massive one for us because we want to leave Bangladesh on a high," said Irish captain Trent Johnson.

"We have had a lot of positives in the two defeats as it was our first tour of the sub-continent. We have proved in the World Cup that we can win in conditions that suit us," he said.

Bangladesh coach Jamie Siddons said he was happy to see

his boys get cheerful at last.

"It was nice to hear the team sing in the dressing room. They deserve it. They stuck to the team rules, put up some runs on the board and defended that," the Australian said.

"Farhad (Reza) took Rasel's place in the side and bowled at the start and in the middle. He reversed it when he came back and took five wickets. It's a great performance for a guy of his height and stature to play like he did. He has a bit of all-round ability and at the moment he is a very valuable member of the team," Siddons commented about Bangladesh's match winner.

"We had beaten a lot of weak teams in the lead-up to the World Cup and the habit helped us in the tournament proper. By beating Ireland we want to get that habit back," said Ashraful, who batted sensibly in the two matches after his total failure against South Africa earlier this month.

"The match was closer than the margin of victory suggests because in the last 20 overs, they needed around 120 runs. Farhad changed the scenario and I believe if we play our best, we will win 3-0."

Farhad was very happy with his success as a new ball bowler, which he is not used to do at this level.

"I am grateful to Aftab and Nafees for taking two brilliant catches. I might have not taken any wickets but for those catches," said Farhad.

Nafees was inside the 30-yard circle when left-handed batsman Eoin Morgan got a leading edge but the Bangladeshi fielder ran backwards and dived to take a one-handed catch.

"I think the wicket was pretty good. We almost made 250 and they were cruising to get 250. I don't think there were too many demons in that track. The ball didn't stop or anything and didn't stop batsmen from playing their

shots. It probably suited our spinners but everywhere we go the pitches tend to suit our opposition and we are giving them a little bit of our own at the moment. It is a good wicket for us."

Mohammad Ashraful, relieved after two wins in his career as Bangladesh captain, said the victory would give them confidence ahead of the Pakistan tour.

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PHOTO: STAR

HERE COMES THE FIFTH ONE: Bangladesh paceman Farhad Reza (L) is elated after bowling Greg Thompson of Ireland to grab his fifth wicket during the second one-day international against Ireland at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 6

## Dhoni defends youth

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Mahendra Singh Dhoni hopes India's "significant" victory in the CB Series will silence those who criticised the youth-oriented squad selection for the tournament. Asserting his role in the selection of the young one-day side -- he is India's ODI captain -- he said it was "sometimes very important to send the message across".

He said he pointed out to the ODI team the questions that were being raised about the players and told them to perform.

It's evident that the criticism ripples even after winning the tournament. "What now? Why are people not asking the same questions now? Because if the result was not in our favour, what would have happened? Would the people have been really behind this side or behind individuals?"

A majority of the team had not

played in Australia earlier and certain sections raised questions about their ability to handle demanding conditions. India's pathetic display in the one-off Twenty20 was seen as a sign of things to come but Dhoni was happy his side had overcome the odds.

"You (the critics) questioned this side but now that it's performed you need to back it," he said of India's first one-day series win in Australia in 23 years. "We all knew, and you all knew, what would have happened if this side didn't do well in Australia. Now that it has done well, why don't you appreciate the performance?"

"We had one of the worst flops in Twenty20 and one of the best wins in the ODI series. Beating Australia is tough. That's why they have the best-of-three finals. You can have one good day and beat them but beating them in two consecutive matches is a significant achievement."

SEE PAGE 18 COL 2

## Domestic football in July

SPORTS REPORTER

The football season of 2008 will kick off on July 1 with the Federation Cup, the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) and the professional league clubs announced yesterday.

With the footballers calling strike in the wake of the cancellation of this month's transfer for the B. League and taking a decision of not playing for even the national team, the BFF involved the clubs to make a joint statement at the BFF Bhaban to convince the players about the authenticity of the declaration.

The representatives of the eight clubs were present while BFF president SA Sultan announced that the transfer will be held from May 13-20 and the B. League will begin on July 20.

Although the transfer is scheduled for May, the domestic football will start in July as the national

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

## LOCAL SNIPPETS

SPORTS REPORTER

Dhanmondi Club (169-8 in 47 overs) won a tight game against Uttara Sporting Club (167-10 in 49.5 overs) by two wickets. Dhanmondi's Mahbubullah took 6 wickets for 40 runs.

In other rain-reduced games, Farug's unbeaten 50 guided Badda ASKS (156-6 in 31.5 overs) to a four-wicket win over Kathalagan (155-5 in 35 overs) at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium and Rupali Bank (155-5 in 23.2 overs) ran to a 5-wicket win over Indira Road (151-10 in 23.1 overs) at the City Club ground.

INDEPENDENCE DAY HOCKEY

Bangladesh Air Force played out a goalless draw with Mirpur Academy in the Dhaka Bank Independence Day Hockey tournament at the Maulana Bhashani National Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Both the teams launched sev-

eral attacks that were futile.

### BOOST POWER CUP

Kalabagan Cricket Academy team beat Cricket Coaching School by 14 runs in the Boost Power Cup under-13 cricket tournament at the Kalabagan ground yesterday.

Batting first, the hosts rode on Akash's 51 to score 137-4 in 20 overs. CCS got close, but were restricted to 123-9 in 20 overs.

Salman smashed 48 off 33 balls which was laced by four boundaries and three sixes for CCS but that wasn't enough.

### GAIBANDHA CRICKET

Our Correspondent: Ghagor Krira Chakra beat Braveheart Sporting Club by 59 runs in the Naheed Cotton First Division Cricket League at the local stadium.

Ghagor batted first and were bowled out for 164 in 49.3 overs to

SEE PAGE 18 COL 4

## Sarwan back for WI

Cricket

REUTERS, Miami

West Indies return to home international action for the first time since last year's World Cup when they take on Sri Lanka in Guyana from Saturday in the first of a two-test series.

Since their poor showing at the one-day showpiece, West Indies have shown sparks of a revival only for disappointment to quickly follow.

Following last year's 3-0 test defeat by England, the Caribbean side claimed their first ever test win in South Africa -- their first test win since May 2005 -- but then lost the next two tests and all five matches

in the one-day series.

Spinners Sulieman Benn and Amit Jaggernauth are included in the squad for the first time, while captain Chris Gayle has Barbados all-rounder Ryan Hinds back in the side for the first time in nearly three years.

The biggest boost though is the return from injury of Guyanese batsman Ramnaresh Sarwan, who will share the top-order pressure with Gayle and Shivnarine Chanderpaul.

"It is a pretty balanced team, it's a good all-round team, the expectation is high and we're looking forward to it," said Gayle.

"Sri Lanka is a good team, they have been playing terrific cricket and it is up to us now to play some good cricket and back our talent,"

he added.

Sri Lanka are without two of their most consistent performers of recent years -- Sanath Jayasuriya, who has retired from tests, and explosive pace bowler Lasith Malinga, who is injured.

But with the prolific wicket-taking ability of spinner Muttiah Muralitharan and the reliable swing bowling of Chaminda Vaas, Gayle sees no reason to underestimate the Sri Lankan threat with the ball at the Providence Stadium in Georgetown.

"They have a good bowling attack without Malinga, they have Vaas and Muralitharan who have been taking most of Sri Lanka's wickets so hopefully we can make the adjustment necessary," said Gayle.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 4

## SL to tour Pakistan

REUTERS, Karachi

Sri Lanka will tour Pakistan for a five-match series of one-day internationals in April and May.

"Sri Lanka has accepted our invitation to play a one-day series," Pakistan Cricket Board chairman Dr Nasim Ashraf told reporters on Thursday.

Board sources told Reuters that Sri Lanka had agreed to tour between April 23 and May 5.

Earlier this week, Bangladesh agreed to play five one-dayers and a Twenty20 match in Pakistan from April 6 to 22.

The two unscheduled tours will fill the void after Australia postponed their trip to Pakistan because of the troubled security situation in the country.



Colourfully dressed Bangladeshi fans enjoy their time during the second one-day international against Ireland at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR



PHOTO: AFP

Manchester United star Cristiano Ronaldo is ecstatic after scoring his 33rd goal, toppling George Best's record in a season, against Bolton Wanderers during their Premiership encounter at Old Trafford on Wednesday.

## 33 in 37 for C'Ron

AFP, Manchester

Cristiano Ronaldo was hailed as a footballing "genius" after the Portugal winger eclipsed George Best as the highest-scoring winger in Manchester United's history and helped edge the Red Devils closer to another English title.

Ronaldo took his United scoring tally for the season to a remarkable 33 goals after hitting the net twice as Sir Alex Ferguson's side defeated Bolton 2-0 at Old Trafford on Wednesday.

United, who entertain fourth-placed Liverpool on Sunday, are now clear favourites to retain the Premier League title after opening up a three-point advantage over second-placed Arsenal with eight games to play.

Ronaldo went past Best's record of 32 goals in a single season -- set in 1967-68 -- with two fabulous first-half strikes, an opportunist finish from 12 yards followed by a

stunning 30-yard free-kick.

The second goal was genius," said Bolton boss Gary Megson, whose side are in deep relegation trouble after losing their last five Premier League games.

"I honestly don't know how he does it. Even my lads were talking about it."

Ferguson was equally glowing in his praise of Ronaldo, who he made captain for the night in the absence of Gary Neville, Rio Ferdinand and Wayne Rooney.

"He didn't make a big issue of it," said Ferguson when asked how Ronaldo reacted to being handed the captain's armband.

"He looks comfortable with the responsibility that comes with the role. It was a marvellous second goal."

Ferguson regards Ronaldo as a worthy successor to the legendary Best. "It speaks volumes of the boy's ability (the record)," he said. "It's amazing that he can do that playing in the position he does. Nobody can do that in this day and age."

The free-kick was marvellous. He does put in the practice and he has this technique."

Ferguson had bemoaned his side's "charitable" finishing before this game yet he need not have worried.

After seeing his side struggle to overcome doomed Derby County four days earlier and having been eliminated from the FA Cup the previous weekend, Ferguson had demanded his players rediscover their touch in front of goal.

The message was heeded by Ronaldo as he notched his 23rd and 24th league goals of the campaign, but Ferguson insisted the title race remained open even though his side are in pole position.

The important thing was that we had the opportunity and the incentive to go three points clear of Arsenal, our nearest pursuers," the Scots said.

"It's nip and tuck now. I think it's going to go to the wire. Chelsea will be key because they have got us and Arsenal at home."

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5

## ASIA CUP CRICKET

### Pakistan, India in same group

AFP, Lahore

Arch-rivals India and Pakistan have been placed in the same group for this year's Asia Cup, the Asian Cricket Council announced here on Thursday.

Hong Kong complete group B, while defending champions Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) form Group A in the ninth edition of the tournament, to be hosted by Pakistan in June-July this year.

All the participating nations have confirmed their participation and we hope to have a safe and highly competitive Asia Cup in three months' time," ACC chief executive Ashraf Hug told AFP.

The Asia Cup, originally supposed to be held every two years, could not be held in 2006 due to a hectic international schedule after hosts Sri Lanka won the eighth edition in 2004.

Hug dispelled fears the event

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5