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## BCB to play waiting game

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board's working committee on Tuesday has decided to take a few more days before finalising the title sponsor for next month's triangular series involving India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

"The issue was discussed during the working committee meeting and it has decided to further negotiate with the companies before taking the final decision," informed Ahmed Sajjadul Alam, media committee chairman, after the meeting yesterday.

"We have all but decided the two in-stadia packages but we have to offer ESPNstar first whether they want to meet the demand, then we will take the decision," he added.

Sajjad also said that the board was not thinking about a fresh bid despite the fact that the offers were well below the floor price.

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## Domestic stars under payroll

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) will bring nearly ten top performers from the National Cricket League and the Premier League into the payroll from next month.

It was discussed when three top board officials met with the national selectors at its management office in Gulshan yesterday.

"We have discussed the players' contract as a number of these will expire on May 31. Automatically some new faces who already debuted in the national side will get the six-month rookie contract," said chief selector Rafiqul Alam.

"We would consider only those

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## Did U Know?

Archery is Bhutan's national sport. Almost every village has an archery range.



## What to WATCH

- SET Max**  
Indian Premier League  
Mumbai Indians v Chennai Super Kings  
Live from 7:30pm
- TEN Sports**  
UEFA Cup Final  
Zenit v Rangers  
Live from 12:40am (Thursday)
- ESPN**  
Asian Shah Hockey  
New Zealand v Argentina  
Live from 2:00pm  
Belgium v Pakistan  
Live from 4:00pm  
Malaysia v Canada  
Live from 6:00pm  
Sportscentre India  
Sports News  
Live at 8:30pm
- STAR Sports**  
Hamburg Masters Tennis  
Second Round  
Live from 5:30pm



**Avram Grant**  
(Chelsea coach)  
"He is a great manager and a great person, I like him personally. It is amazing what he did."  
While paying tribute to Manchester United boss Sir Alex Ferguson.

## SAFF camp from today

Football  
SPORTS REPORTER

The final preparation camp for the fifth SAFF Football Championship will begin today at BKSP but the number of players to be in the squad was not finalised even last night.

After the national team's return from Kyrgyzstan, where they had a dismal performance in the AFC Challenge Cup qualifiers, different quarters including the National Team Management Committee chairman Badal Roy wanted to include some senior players to strengthen the team.

Badal and his colleagues managed to convince coach Abu Yusuf to include defender Nazrul Islam and midfielder Arif Khan Joy after long discussions on Monday and last night. Yusuf was not forced but he will take the final decision today after talking with the booters.

Yusuf, whose side drew 0-0 with Afghanistan who won the group and qualified for the tournament proper and lost 2-1 to the hosts, wanted only the 18 footballers who made the trip and the remaining eight of the

reserve squad for the SAFF camp.

Although Yusuf admitted his midfield was virtually non-functioning and he felt absence of playmaker or holding and defensive midfielders in the side, Yusuf believes only 'fit' players should be in the squad.

"I do not know about the fitness level of the players outside the squad because they have not played for long. If we go to Thailand to play two friendly matches for preparation, we would get just one week at home to train. This time is not enough to get a player into shape," Yusuf had told yesterday before the meeting. "We have young players and they will mature if the graph of improvement goes upward."

"There problem is not physical, it's mental. They have to have the confidence and if they can gain it, we will do well in the SAFF," added the former national defender who claimed the team's defence was fine despite conceding two goals inside four minutes after taking a 1-0 lead against Kyrgyzstan.

"It was because the midfield or the attackers did not kill the opposition attacks in time, putting the backline under tremendous pres-

sure."

Yusuf's plan may help the national team in the long run but for the SAFF Championship, which kicks off June 3 in Maldives and Sri Lanka, Bangladesh have little hopes.

Last year's runners-up and 2003 winners Bangladesh have played the last three finals and Badal feels it is a matter of prestige for the country to do well in the regional "World Cup".

"We have heard from the coach that five or six players did not perform well and we feel we should replace them with experienced ones. Our meeting started with good intention but we do not want to impose anything on the coach."

"All we feel that the team's strength has to be increased if we have to succeed in this tournament. And the problem is in the midfield. We also feel that there are players outside the squad who are still able to step in and play," added Badal, also a vice-president of the Bangladesh Football Federation.

SAFF team manager and former striker Sheikh Mohammed Aslam and ex-national booters Hasanzaman Babloo and Satyajit Das Rupu also was in discussion with Yusuf.



Prime Bank chairman Azam J Chowdhury (R) shakes hands with BFF president Kazi Salahuddin during a meeting at the bank's Gulshan office yesterday.

## Prime Bank secured as sponsors

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) yesterday renewed its ties with Prime Bank as sponsors of the coming B. League.

Although the bank had committed to sponsor the second edition of the professional football league earlier during the past committee of the federation, the newly elected executive committee met the officials of the bank at their Gulshan office to secure the ropes that at times felt loose.

Prime Bank confirmed it will give 1.25 crore taka for two tournaments -- the B. League and the National Football League for this season.

The National Football League has been stopped for two years while the inaugural B. League ended without getting a sponsor last year.

Welcoming the new BFF body led by president and former footballer Kazi Salahuddin, Prime Bank chairman Azam J Chowdhury said they want to extend their helping hands to football also in the future.

"We will not be confined to our promised money for two events, and we will extend our assistance in future but it will depend on how the federation performs this time," Chowdhury told reporters after the meeting.

"If football goes forward, we will extend the area of sponsorship," he promised.

The Prime Bank chairman also thought that the federation should concentrate on the grassroots in a bid to promote the game and

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## NATIONAL CRICKET Rangpur take zonal honours

SPORTS REPORTER

Rangpur became zonal champions with a massive 122-run victory over Rajshahi in the rain-interrupted final to reach the final round of the 28th National Cricket Championship yesterday.

Alauddin and Ferdous smashed sparkling half-centuries as the hosts piled up 281-8 after deciding to bat first at the Rajshahi Divisional Stadium.

Alauddin was adjudged man-of-the-match for his 55-ball 76 runs knock while Ferdous scored 70 and Salahuddin added 41 runs. Raju captured three wickets while Jony picked up two.

Rajshahi were on the brink of defeat with their score on 140-8 in 42 overs before the match was stopped due to rain but ultimately the bigger district conceded the huge defeat under the parabola method. Romeo scored 34 runs and Asif made 28. Rahman and Monir claimed two wickets each.

Rangpur completed the eight-team final round line-up at Sylhet, Dhaka, Khulna, Barisal, Narayanganj, Comilla and Nilphamari confirmed their berths earlier.

The final round will start on May 17 with Dhaka taking on Comilla at the Sylhet Stadium.

Barisal meet Sylhet on May 18, Narayanganj face Nilphamari on May 19 and Khulna take on Rangpur on May 20 in the quarterfinals.

The semifinals will be held on May 21 and 22 respectively while the final is scheduled for May 24 at the same venue.

## 2nd win for Mariners, Azad

SPORTS REPORTER

Ranjan Banik slotted a brace to help Mariner Youngs Club record their second successive win in the Green Delta Insurance Premier Hockey League yesterday.

Last year's runners-up Mariners, who failed to win a single match in three attempts this year, defeated second-from-bottom Bangladesh Sporting Club 4-2 at the Maulana Bhasani National Hockey Stadium after leading 2-0 at the break.

Ranjan fired Mariners into lead after 22 minutes while Prashanta made it 2-0 on the half hour before veteran Zahid Bishwas pulled one goal back for Bangladesh Sporting four minutes after the break.

Ranjan's second goal came in the 52nd minute but the minnows bounced back, reducing the arrears again through Hasan in the 64th minute.

Mariners spent some anxious moments before Mahub sealed the victory three minutes from time.

In the day's other match, Jamil, Jubar and Ajit scored one goal each as Azad Sporting Club crushed pointless Wari Club 3-0.

After their second win, Azad reached six points -- one point adrift of Mariners -- while Bangladesh Sporting remained on one point.



An action from yesterday's Premier Hockey League match between Azad Sporting and Wari Club at the Maulana Bhasani National Hockey Stadium.

## Sachin boosts Mumbai



CRICINFO, undated

Sachin Tendulkar has said he is fit and will lead the Mumbai Indians in their next home game, against the Chennai Super Kings on Wednesday at the Wankhede Stadium, in the Indian Premier League (IPL).

The news will be a shot in the arm for Mumbai, who played the first-half of the tournament without Tendulkar, forced to sit out with a groin injury.

The rehabilitation process has been successful, Tendulkar announced today; there was no "discomfort" and he will open Mumbai's innings with Sanath Jayasuriya.

"I will be playing on May 14. It's looking very good and I'm feeling very positive," Tendulkar said after a two-hour batting session at the venue. He said it was really "tough" for him to sit out but acknowledged the support of the fitness staff who had "really worked hard, especially the physio and the masseur".

Tendulkar first picked up the injury during the CB Series in Australia and it got worse after the first Test against South Africa in Chennai, forcing him to miss the final two matches of the series. He was unable to recover for the start of the IPL, missing Mumbai's first seven games.

Though Mumbai lost their first four games, Tendulkar was careful not to return before he was completely fit. "It was disappointing to miss the two Tests against South Africa and then seven IPL games. But during the first half of the rehabilitation I had to completely rest

and followed it by strengthening of the muscles and working out a bit. With the help of the fitness staff all the things went fine and I'm feeling strong now and there is no discomfort."

In his absence Harbhajan Singh led Mumbai for the first three games and after he was banned for an on-field row with Sreesanth, Shaun Pollock came in as the stand-in captain. Asked if it would be difficult for the side to have another new captain especially when Pollock was proving to be successful, Tendulkar said the players had supported each other through it all and they understood each other well.

"I will be the captain. Shaun was a makeshift captain and he did a terrific job and the other senior players have also contributed well. It's not about who the captain is but it's about helping each other

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## Marauding Marsh



CRICINFO, undated

The troubles don't seem to abate for the Bangalore Royal Challengers; off-field controversies played the bottom-placed side going into the match against Kings XI Punjab, and a nine-wicket mauling in Mohali Monday night leaves the second-most expensive franchise in the Indian Premier League (IPL) all but out of the semifinals.

On a hard deck suited for strokeplay, Bangalore's batsmen once again failed to fire, and after they were restricted to 143, the chase was a mere formality. Shaun

Marsh, though, didn't show any mercy on a hapless opposition, and his unbeaten 74 completed an emphatic nine-wicket win, pushing his team to second place.

After Rahul Dravid, the under-pressure Bangalore captain, decided to bat, Misbahul Haq and Virat Kohli gave a glimmer of hope that the side's top-order woes had come to an end. But unfortunately, both batsmen failed to capitalise on their starts.

Shanthakumar Sreesanth and Irfan Pathan got the ball to swing early; Pathan's first over was a maiden, while Jagadeesh Arunkumar was done in by some extra bounce from Sreesanth. That brought in Misbah, who managed to hit two short balls from Sreesanth for four, though not convincingly. At the other end,

Kohli dispatched Pathan for successive fours. Misbah then launched Sreesanth just over the long-off boundary, but the four that followed was among the best in the tournament, as Misbah made room to a full delivery on middle, got down on his knee and majestically drove the ball square. But next ball he was out in bizarre fashion, as he somehow trod onto the stumps while pushing a Sreesanth delivery to the off-side.

Yuvraj took a gamble by bringing Piyush Chawla in the final overplay over, and though he started by straying on leg, he bowled Kohli after the batsman had swept him twice to the boundary. Once Misbah and Kohli exited, Bangalore failed to keep up the momentum. VRR Singh slipped in a

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## Cruciani interested

Football  
AL MUSABBIR SADI

Former national football coach Diego Cruciani would consider returning to Bangladesh if the newly elected executive committee of Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) wants him back.

While chatting on the internet with this correspondent, the Argentine coach who guided Bangladesh to the 2005 SAFF Championship final but ended up in the losing side, mentioned on Monday that he keeps a tab on the situation in Bangladesh and is very happy to see footballers and experienced organisers taking over BFF.

"All the good guys are there now and I wish all of them good luck. And my greetings to all the friends over there, to players, officials and journalists," Cruciani added.

The Argentine, whose style and football philosophy impressed even the strictest critics after Bangladesh produced a lively brand of football immediately after his arrival, said he did not mind about the fracas that marred his departure from Bangladesh.

Cruciani's contract was not

renewed by the BFF while his second stint at Bangladesh, with Abahani during the inaugural B. League, also ended prematurely due to crowd pressure.

"I was ashamed because two of the three players I brought from Abahani from Argentina did not deliver the goods. Also, the fans were pressing me hard," Cruciani had said earlier.

"Now that a workable committee is in the seat, I feel they will plan long-term for football," said Cruciani, who is now at home to nurse his ailing father.

The 43-year-old worked till

January as assistant coach of his mentor and 1978 World Cup winning coach Cesar Luis Menotti at Mexican Premier Division side Tecos -- the team of University of Guadalajara -- but had to leave early to attend his father.

"I miss Bangladesh very much and feel it is second home to me. I have seen that they are interested to have foreign coaches and trainers for junior and national teams and I would like to be back."

Cruciani, who will send his father to a special care unit and would be free for job very soon, said changing coaches frequently will never give a team the time to settle.

He also said he was sad to see a lower-ranked team like Afghanistan qualify for the AFC Challenge Cup finals at the expenses of Bangladesh.

"This is one of the reasons Bangladesh have lagged behind when Afghanistan, a war-torn nation who have just returned from the wilderness, have improved a lot. They have not changed their German coach (Klaus Staerk) and this could be a great lesson for Bangladesh officials."

"When you let the coach to stay long time, the results appear," said Cruciani in a message to Bangladesh football.



DIEGO CRUCIANI

## Hadlee encourages him Sidebottom named player-of-the-year

Cricket  
AFP, London

England seamer Ryan Sidebottom has said he is flattered at being identified as the key threat to New Zealand during their upcoming series by Sir Richard Hadlee.

Outstanding pace bowler Hadlee was the chairman of the New Zealand selection panel that chose the squad for the three-Test series which starts at Lord's here on Thursday.

And having seen left-arm seamer Sidebottom take 24 wickets for England during their 2-1 series win in New Zealand earlier this year, Hadlee was in no doubt of the worth of his fellow Nottinghamshire bowler.

"Sidebottom bowled beautifully in New Zealand, he proved to be a major challenge for us and we will have to combat him if we are to stand any chance of even being

competitive in the series," said Hadlee, the first bowler to take 400 Test wickets.

"Sidebottom can swing it both ways, bowls a heavy ball, and can bowl left-arm around the wicket, which is an unusual skill for a left-hander to possess."

"Ryan also has nagging accuracy, he showed in New Zealand his ability to get the ball there and thereabouts most of the time, and again that is something which will test our side. They are going to be coming up against a very skilful bowler."

Late on Monday, Sidebottom was named England's player-of-the-year and, responding to Hadlee's comments, told reporters at Lord's: "It's a massive compliment coming from such a great bowler, but New Zealand will still be a tough team to beat."

"I think they showed that in New Zealand, it was hard graft for us and to come out 2-1 winners was a massive effort."

"I've only played a handful of games and of course I'd like to continue in the same vein, but it's not going to be easy."

Sidebottom has enjoyed a memorable year after reviving an international career that looked as if it had long since finished.

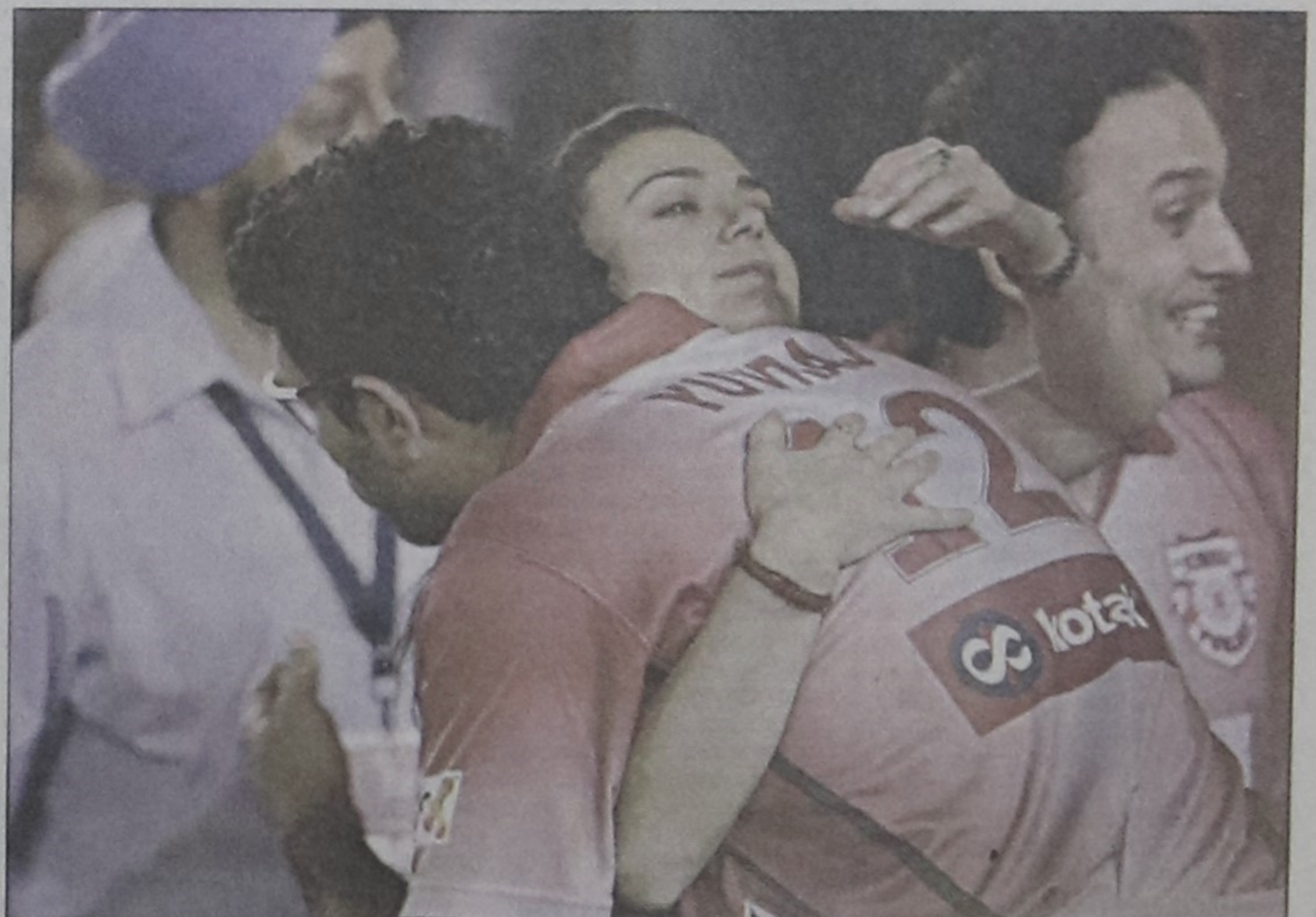
The 30-year-old took 53 wickets at 25.24 in 12 Tests after being recalled last season in place of the injured Matthew Hoggard for the second Test against the West Indies at Headingley, the ground where he began his career with Yorkshire.

England coach Peter Moores's decision to bring back Sidebottom came six years after the bowler made his Test debut at Lord's only to be dropped straight away after a wicketless game against Pakistan.

But he has now become the cornerstone of England's attack. "It's been a massive change in my fortunes," Sidebottom admitted.

"This time last year, I was training for Notts and just playing for Notts and just playing

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Punjab co-owner and Bollywood superstar Preity Zinta hugs captain Yuvraj Singh after their fantastic nine-wicket win over hapless Bangalore at the Mohali Cricket Stadium yesterday.