



PHOTO: STAR  
Premier Bangladesh pace bowler Mashrafe Bin Mortaza ponders the fog impact during Tigers' final practice session ahead of the first Test against Sri Lanka at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

## 1ST BANGLADESH-SRI LANKA TEST STARTS TODAY Focus firmly on cricket

BISHWAJIT ROY



While the country is in the grip of general elections, it might be hard for someone to find a place for cricket. But there has been no way-out for Mohammad Ashraful and company when the first Test of the two-match series against Sri Lanka starts at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur today.

In every nook and corner the main topic of discussion is the elections and it already provides a rare opportunity to not only the players but also to many to experience a six-day Test as there will be a rest day on the fourth day, the election date, December 29th.

But it can't put aside the challenge ahead for the Tigers when they meet the formidable Lankans who have a great record against them. But, there were questions all around about whether the home team would be able to enter the New Year with some sort of inspiration by rewriting history against Mahela Jayawardene's men.

"We have no time to think anything other than cricket. Many including me may exercise the voting rights for the first time but only cricket is in our mind right at the moment," said Bangladesh captain

Mohammad Ashraful for whom it's an acid Test as the right-hander has been going through a long lean patch -- inviting huge criticism.

Bangladesh batsmen particularly should show their character against a versatile bowling attack to disprove the scrupulous predictions of a three-day end wrong, thereby doing away with the need for a rest day.

And Bangladesh coach Jamie Siddons believes that the time has come for his young batsmen to step up to give something for the bowlers who enhanced their reputations in the recent past series.

"We played the best two teams (South Africa and New Zealand) in the world in three series' in the last six months and now we have a team that I think should be able to compete pretty well. We are still a young side, still developing, but I think its time for the players to step up," said a confident Siddons.

"It's time for Ashraful (Mohammad), Shakib (Al Hasan), Mehrab (Hossain), these guys, to start making big runs and give the bowlers something to bowl at. I am looking forward to that. That's the Christmas present I want. That's what I expect. Hopefully they can deliver," he added.

Sri Lankan has a variety in their bowling attack and anybody can take the

charge on his day against the home team but still it's Muttiah Muralidaran who is understandably considered as the most dangerous man for them.

The Tigers coach however disclosed the plan against the dangerous man who proved himself as a wrecker-in-chief by picking up 76 scalps in nine Tests against the home team.

"I think we have two or three guys who are picking the things very well and the other guys haven't faced him. I just want them to play their natural game, he has to bowl well to get wickets against us. Murali just bowls the cricket ball like everyone else, only he seems to bowl in the right areas more than most. But we still have to play him with an attacking frame of mind. I am hoping the players score off him," he said, explaining the strategy against the champion bowler.

On the other hand the recent bowling success mainly centered on left-arm spinner Shakib who had showed his caliber both on slow and bouncy pitches in South Africa to earn the respect from his coach as a 'world-class bowler'.

Many however still doubt the bowler's success against the Sri Lankan batting line-up who has a good record against the slow bowlers, but Siddons kept his faith on his young bowler.

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### Did U Know?

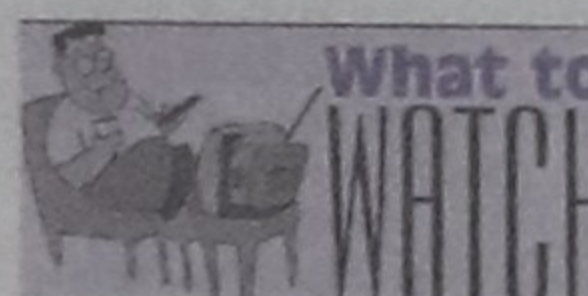
Indian spin legend Bhagwat Chandrasekhar is the only cricketer to have scored fewer runs in his Test career than the number of wickets he took. He took 242 wickets whereas scored only 177 runs.



### Talk Turkey



**Kevin Pietersen**  
(England cricket captain)  
"When I was batting I saw on the scoreboard South Africa had won -- and it made me chuckle a little bit."  
Taking pleasure from Australia's defeat in Perth.



### What to Watch

**BTV**  
Bangladesh v Sri Lanka  
First Test, Day One  
Live from 9:30am

**ESPN**  
English Premiership  
Stoke City v Man United  
Live from 6:40pm  
Liverpool v Bolton  
Live from 8:55pm

**STAR Sports**  
English Premiership  
Chelsea v West Brom  
Live from 6:55pm  
Man City v Hull City  
Live from 9:00pm  
Aston Villa v Arsenal  
Live from 11:10pm

**STAR Cricket**  
Australia v South Africa  
Second Test, Day 2  
Live from 5:30am (Saturday)



**Day's Event**  
Bangladesh v Sri Lanka  
First Test, Day One  
Venue: Sher-e-Bangla Stadium, Chittagong  
Time: 9:30am

## Mahela has no doubt

SPORTS REPORTER



Sri Lanka is set to become only the fifth team to play Test cricket at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium but skipper Mahela Jayawardene had no qualms about the playing surface.

The latest international venue of the country has developed a reputation of producing sporting wickets mostly because it has also favoured the fast bowlers during the first few days.

"I haven't played in this ground before to be honest but obviously the wicket looked different from what I have played here (in Bangladesh) in the past. The clay is much darker. So there is no concern as it is just a different wicket," said Jayawardene in the pre-match press conference in Mirpur yesterday.

But the pitch, after a bout under the covers this week, could spring a surprise or two as it is rumoured to have some grass on it. It could be a ploy to liven up the wicket and stop Muttiah Muralidaran.

"I think even if you ask the Bangladeshi players they do not know exactly how the wicket is going to play. It is under the covers for 4-5 days and now the sun is out, so it is drying

up nicely. Hopefully it will be very good Test wicket," added Jayawardene whose side have won three out of the previous five Tests so far this year.

Although the Sri Lanka line-up is pretty much written down, the 31-year-old mentioned a 'ten per cent' window for anyone to get in.

"We probably know about ninety per cent of our combination but we wanted to wait and see how the wicket is going to come out and then will make the final decision and that will only be done after I have a chat with the selectors in the evening," said Jayawardene, who added: "Test match is played over five days; you can't play for the first couple of the day of a Test match. I think wickets all over the world tends to slow down by time and probably take spin, and when you have quality spinners you should take use of that."

"Obviously Rangana (Herath) bowled really well in the warm-up game. You have (Muttiah) Muralidaran in the side, I think we will go for what we think is the best combination for this Test," added the stylish right-hander.

He also agreed that Sri Lanka's luxury of having several fast bowlers in the ranks helps him but makes it difficult for him to pick and choose.

"That's a healthy headache that we have got."

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## Nasir inspires MSC

SPORTS REPORTER



Nasir Hossain set one for Hedayetullah Robin and scored the other to orchestrate Mohammedan's impressive start to the second leg of the Citycell B. League yesterday.

The Dhaka giants defeated Arambagh 2-0 at the Bangabandhu National Stadium to move within one point of leaders and archrivals Abahani after 11 rounds.

Mohammedan, who are level with Brothers Union on 22 points, will look to shut the slim gap with defending champions Abahani -- who have shown decline in performance -- in the coming rounds after an authoritative show that saw the black and whites take absolute domination.

However, the Federation Cup champions had to wait for one hour for the deserved opening goal.

Piru stood graceful under the Arambagh bar against a relentless assault as Mohammedan came alive after seven minutes. But Robin headed a cross by his Nigerian

strike partner Bukola over the bar before taking a poor volley straight to Piru after hard work by Ripon at the left.

Maruful Haque's side, who had injured captain Arman Aziz back in the centre of midfield after four matches, kept the pressure and Robin wasted his third chance to score in the 14th minute when his header was cleared by Ratan from the face of the goal.

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POINTS TABLE								
Teams	M	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts	
Abahani	11	7	2	2	19	6	23	
Mohammedan	11	6	4	1	21	7	22	
Brothers	11	6	4	1	19	9	22	
Russel	11	6	3	2	19	11	21	
Cig MSC	11	4	5	2	9	6	17	
Rahmatganj	10	4	2	4	10	9	14	
Cig Abahani	11	3	4	4	8	8	13	
Farashganj	11	3	4	4	9	12	13	
Arambagh	11	2	3	6	9	16	9	
Muktijoddha	11	2	1	8	5	23	7	
Khulna Abahani	11	1	0	10	7	28	3	



PHOTO: STAR  
Mohammedan's Nigerian player Dami Emmanuel shoots the ball past Arambagh keeper Piru (R) during a corner in their Citycell B. League match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

## Pakistan coming here in March

APP, Karachi

Pakistan will tour Bangladesh to play five one-day internationals in March next year, an official said Wednesday.

Pakistan have not played a bilateral series in Bangladesh since 2002 although they toured the nation to play a tri-series in May this year.

"There is an opinion that Pakistan has been isolated at international level but it's not correct and we have arranged tours for the team," Pakistan Cricket Board chief operating officer Salim Altaf told reporters.

"As part of our team playing more cricket we will play five one-day matches in Bangladesh starting the tour on March 3," Altaf said.

Pakistan has been deprived of quality cricket on home soil as foreign teams have refused to tour over security fears.

India pulled out of next month's planned visit to Pakistan after New Delhi refused to clear the tour as tension mounted between the two countries in the wake of terror attacks in Mumbai last month.

Pakistan have also arranged a stop-gap series of five one-dayers and three Tests with Sri Lanka next month.

Altaf said he hoped Australia, who postponed their tour of Pakistan in March this year over security fears, would play five one-day matches in Pakistan in March-April next year.

"I have talked to Cricket Australia on the five-match series and there is always the option of playing Australia at a neutral venue if they have any reservations on playing in Pakistan," said Altaf.

Australia have not toured Pakistan since 1998.

## Amol's double delight

SPORTS REPORTER

Amol Roy bagged double crown in the Popular Pharmaceuticals Victory Day tennis tournament which ended at the Ramna National tennis Complex yesterday.

After previously clinching the doubles title pairing with Ranjan Ram, Amol defeated his partner 6-3, 6-3 in the men's singles final on the concluding day.

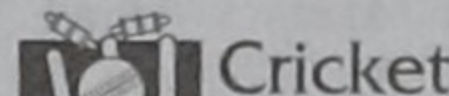
Ayami also won double crown after her women's singles and doubles triumphs. President of Bangladesh Tennis Federation AMM Nasiruddin distributed trophies and prize money as chief guest.

Managing Director of Popular Pharmaceuticals, sponsor of the event, Dr Mustafizur Rahman was present as special guest.



PHOTO: STAR  
CATCH ME IF YOU CAN: Sri Lanka all-rounder Tillakaratne Dilshan (with the ball in hand) is being chased by teammates during a practice session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

## SA's chance at hand MCG Test begins today



CRICINFO, undated

It will be almost impossible for the Boxing Day Test to live up to the drama of South Africa's win in Perth. So unexpected was their brilliant chase of 414 that it left both teams in a state of shock. The squads have had a few days to digest the outcome and for Australia the distaste of losing forced at least one player to be spat out.

But it will take more than just personnel alterations for Ricky Ponting's men to fight back in Melbourne when the second Test begins here today. They face the challenge of turning a moderate attack into one capable of curbing South

Africa's powerful batting line-up, while their own batsmen try to click back into gear.

South Africa have spent so long chasing Australia that it must be an odd feeling for them to know that they are potentially five days of good cricket from beating them in a series in Australia for the first time. An Australian victory would set up a thrilling decider in Sydney. The book-makers still have Australia as warm favourites but the way South Africa played in Perth, it would be a brave punter to back against them.

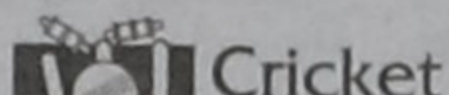
On a side note, a strange thing happened during the week. Two days after South Africa's greatest Test victory they actually fell in the International Cricket

Council's (ICC) Test rankings. The intricacies of the ranking system meant India's series-clinching draw against England was enough to nudge them ahead of South Africa, although it will almost certainly be temporary. South Africa will regain second place unless they lose both remaining Tests and if they win them both they will take the top spot from Australia.

Matthew Hayden is having one of the leaner runs of his Test career but if he could pick the perfect place to try and bounce back it would be the MCG. Hayden has made centuries in the past three Boxing Day Tests and in six of the past seven. Since 2001 he has averaged 102.40 at the

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## Good 2008 for India



CNN-IBN, Chandigarh

It was a perfect finish to a perfect home season. After humbling Australia 2-0 in the recent four-Test series and blanking England 5-0 in the one-dayers, lifting the RBS Cup Test series against England was the icing on the cake for India.

Now, it is this winning momentum which needs to be kept intact, even though Indian skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni says, "We don't really need to focus on rankings, we just need to focus on cricket."

The raw material for a charge up the rankings is in place and the names in the Indian batting line-up are enough to send shivers down the spine of bowling attacks around the world. The latest jewel in the Indian batting crown is Gautam Gambhir, who reeled off over 800 runs in the season to announce his pedigree.

Gambhir says, "I think it is just the hunger

for runs because I haven't got this easily. It is important to make it count when you are in good nick."

And Dhoni can even call upon the bowling talent, which will hold the key in future matches. While Harbhajan Singh and Amit Mishra were below par against England, in Ishant Sharma and man-of-the-series against England, Zaheer Khan, a formidable new ball pair is in place.

"He provides that extra pace which is required at this level," Zaheer says of his pace bowling partner. "It is good to bowl in tandem with him because I can maintain my line and length and I can do the restricting job and he can be the attacking bowler."

So who will it be that snatches away Australia's crown? India or South Africa? To this, former England pacer and cricket writer Angus Fraser says, "South Africa are a very good side, but I just think India's spin bowling gives them the slight edge."

There is no cricket slated for India over the

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