

Ashraful upbeat

First official practice game today

TIGERCRIKET.COM, London



Bangladesh skipper Mohammad Ashraful believes the Tigers are preparing well for the ICC World T20 which kicks off on June 5.

"We have come here one week early, had three games against New Zealand, Holland and Scotland and the boys have done well. We are confident and there are two tough games against Australia tomorrow [Monday] and Sri Lanka the day after. So that's a nice build up to the main tournament," said Ashraful at the captains' media briefing at Lord's yesterday.

The Bangladesh skipper was due to stay back in London until later in the evening for the official dinner before he would leave for Nottinghamshire. The rest of the Bangladesh squad is already in Nottingham, their World T20 base, and had a training session at Lady Bay to prepare for today's warm-up against Australia at Trent Bridge.

The Tigers are expected to go in with three spinners and three pacers against the Aussies. Nayem Islam might make a return to the side after missing the last two practice matches with a sore shoulder. Shahadat Hossain is likely to be kept out again with Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Syed Raseel and Rubel Hossain forming the pace attack.

The game starts at 1:30pm local time (6:30pm Bangladesh Time) with ESPNStar Sports beaming live coverage in South Asia.

Ashraful was looking forward to the first

match of Group A against India at Trent Bridge on June 6.

"In this form of the game any side can beat the other. We defeated the West Indies in the last World T20 in South Africa and progressed to the Super Eights. Our main goal is to repeat that and if we beat India, who are the world champions, in the first match then we will fancy our chances of doing well against the other top sides and making the semifinals even."

The captain was asked about the new kid on the block Rubel Hossain who has been too hot to handle for Holland and Scotland in warm-up matches.

"He has taken nine wickets in two matches and is bowling really well. He has an awkward action and has bit of extra pace," said Ashraful.

Ashraful also put his money on vice-captain Mashrafe to come into his own against India despite a rather forgettable Indian Premier League campaign for Kolkata Knight Riders where he just got one game and went for many.

"It was only in the last over that he did badly. Otherwise I thought he was okay. But I know he'll be back. He is that type of a player. He always does well against India."

Mortaza has been the man-of-the-match in both games Bangladesh have won against India.

Asked about the comment from the Ireland captain William Potterfield that they wanted to beat Bangladesh, Ashraful said the Tigers were the better side.

"I think if we play our best cricket then we should not have a problem against Ireland because we have more quality in the side."



Bangladesh skipper Mohammad Ashraful poses with the ICC World Twenty20 Championship trophy following a press conference at Lord's in London yesterday.

Twenty20 is home

AFP, London



Cricket's newest format returns to its birthplace when England hosts the World Twenty20 from Friday with the event kicking off a bumper

summer which includes one of the sport's oldest combats, the Ashes.

But, as with all the other forms of one-day cricket first played in England at county level, the 'mother country' has found herself having to play catch-up with the rest of the world.

Originally conceived as a fun way of bringing new audiences, particularly those who couldn't watch cricket during the working day, into the game, Twenty20 has taken the sport by storm.

Tournaments such as the Indian Premier League (IPL) are now far more lucrative per match for a player than five-day Test cricket, the traditional pinnacle of the sport.

India, whose administrators were originally hostile to Twenty20 because they feared its commercial impact upon the 50-over game, won the inaugural global tournament in South Africa two years ago.

Nine members of that winning squad, which defeated arch-rivals Pakistan by five runs in a thrilling final in Johannesburg, will be coming to England.

But, in what above all other types of cricket is a game heavily weighted in favour of batsmen, India will be without master run-maker Sachin Tendulkar, who has now opted out of Twenty20 internationals.

Generally short boundaries and fielding

restrictions put a premium on big-hitting batsmen and in Yuvraj Singh they have someone who struck England's Stuart Broad for six sixes in an over in South Africa.

Tendulkar, who himself played in this year's IPL, warned it was important that openers Yuvraj and Gautam Gambhir were refreshed after failing to find top form in the IPL.

"I think the key would be how soon they can shed the fatigue factor," Tendulkar said.

Wicket-taking bowlers are an invaluable commodity in a game where economy rates can go out the window and India look to have a promising pace attack.

Left-armers Rudra Pratap Singh, who took 12 wickets in South Africa in 2007, will be supported this time around by Zaheer Khan and Ishant Sharma.

Pakistan, starved of international cricket at home after a terror attack on the Sri Lanka team bus in Lahore in March made the country a 'no-go zone', will fancy their chances of going one better this time around.

"I thought Australia would thrash them in the one-off T20 match in Dubai but it was the other way round and now, if Pakistan play to their potential, they can win the title," Pakistan great Wasim Akram told AFP this month.

Australia have dominated all forms of cricket during the last decade except Twenty20 and captain Ricky Ponting is determined to improve both his and the team's record.

"The past couple of games I've played have been very poor," he said. "In the two games in South Africa I made one in each. It's not great form going into a World Cup."

Ponting gave Australia a scare when he

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Did U Know?

Men's water polo was the first team sport added to the Olympic programme in 1900.



Talk Turkey



Enrico Preziosi

(Genoa president)
"It's an important signing, we're very happy. Crespo is a great player, a serious lad who we've been following for a long time."

After signing Inter Milan forward Hernan Crespo.



What to Watch

STAR Sports

French Open
Live from 3:00pm

ESPN

ICC World Twenty20
Warm-up Matches

Australia v Bangladesh
Live at 6:30pm

Pakistan v South Africa
Live from 10:30pm

STAR Cricket

ICC World T20
Warm-up Matches

Ireland v Holland
Live at 6:30pm

India v New Zealand
Live from 10:30pm

Women's football

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has summoned a 38-member squad to form the national women's football team for the upcoming South Asian (SA) games later this year.

All players are requested to report to a primary training camp under football coach Golam Rabbani Choton at the Dhanmondi Women's Complex on June 5.

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Where's the Dhaka cricketer?

MOHAMMAD ISAM

Dhaka is the centre of Bangladesh cricket but the country's biggest city is definitely not a big enough provider of cricketers nowadays.

It might be hard to believe but it would be surprising to find a club side having more than one player who was born and brought up in the capital city. Even in the current national team, Mohammad Ashraful is the only player from Dhaka while the rest of the team is a result of cricket high-up's decentralisation concept.

The 1997 boom in Bangladesh cricket had a defining affect to the players who come through from the different districts. Bangladesh Cricket Board was slow to move at first but once the age-group tournaments were held, the districts began to churn out cricketers in large numbers.

While that has worked as part of BCB's development programme, the side effect has definitely been the shortage of the Dhaka cricketer.

It is disappointing to find such a dearth and

experts consider enough reasons for this phenomenon to continue. Background, educational curriculum, distractions and a definite lack of grounds make cricket a very difficult choice as a career.

According to former national captain Roquibul Hassan, the social backdrop in the capital city comes as a major hindrance for the aspiring Dhaka cricketer.

"People who stay in Dhaka are affluent and privileged. The parents are not convinced that cricket can be a career. Apart from this, the kind of curriculum they get in school is stressful and as a result the boys don't get enough time for cricket," said Roquibul.

Roquibul, currently on duty as a match referee in Bogra, thinks that apart from the parents' pressure to perform in studies and the children having way too many distractions, the lack of space also plays a huge part.

"There used to be schools that used to give importance to cricket but now, with the pressure of admitting extra amount of students, they tend to build buildings in the open

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Match drawn in Bogra

SPORTS REPORTER

The first four-day between Bangladesh A and Maharashtra Cricket Association (MCA) predictably ended in a draw after rain shortened the final day at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogra yesterday.

Only two hours of play was possible during which the visitors reached 498 in 158.2 overs in their first innings. Bangladesh A were 37 for one in their second innings when rain washed out the rest of the day.

But there was enough time for Rohit Motwani and Srikanth Mandle to reach hundreds. Motwani remained patient as

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King Nadal ousted

Ivanovic follows suit

AFP, Paris



Defending champion Rafael Nadal was knocked out of the French Open on Sunday losing in the fourth round to Sweden's Robin Soderling 6-2, 6-7 (2/7), 6-4, 7-6 (7/2).

Soderling will play either Russian 10th seed Nikolay Davydenko or Fernando Verdasco, the eighth-seeded Spaniard for a place in the semifinals.

Belarusian teenager Victoria Azarenka sunk Ana Ivanovic's hopes of defending her French Open crown with a comprehensive 6-2, 6-3 win in the fourth round.

It is the first time the 19-year-old has reached the last eight at a Grand Slam event and she will play Russian top seed Dinaara Safina for

a place in the semifinals.

The 21-year-old Ivanovic, meanwhile, was left pondering what she has to do to re-discover the form that brought her the title and world No.1 spot a year ago.

Top seed Dinaara Safina eased into the French Open quarterfinals defeating Aravane Rezaï of France 6-1, 6-0 in a 53-minute centre-court mismatch.

It was the Russian's 18th win out of 19 matches on clay this season and confirmed her status as favourite to win her first Grand Slam title.

Ten-time Grand Slam title winner Serena Williams angrily denounced her Roland Garros opponent as a 'cheat' on Saturday as two of the world's top 10 crashed to shock French Open defeats.

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Spanish world number one Rafael Nadal serves the ball to Swedish Robin Soderling (not in picture) in the French Open round of 16 match at Roland Garros in Paris yesterday. Nadal, the king of clay, was eventually beaten by the Swede.

Tax holiday for BFF sponsors

SPORTS REPORTER

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) has relieved the sponsors of the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) from their tax obligations for the current fiscal year.

Previously, the sponsors of BFF were liable to the NBR for a 15% VAT on all sponsorship money that they disbursed.

Last month, BFF president Kazi Salahuddin along with other BFF officials met with Finance Minister AMA Muhith at his office where an application for exemption was submitted. The NBR has now granted the exemption, which will enable the governing body of football to retain an estimate of Tk.1 crore in the current year.

The tax release comes as a great boost for BFF as it has three major corporate houses as its sponsors. BFF General Secretary Al-Musabbir Sadi has welcomed the decision saying it will make more funds available for the development of football.

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Said's fiver at BNS

SPORTS REPORTER



Abu Said of Moslehuddin Secondary School scored a mammoth five goals contributing to his team's victory over Azimuddin High School by 8-2 goals in the Citycell National School Football Championship at the Bangabandhu National Stadium (BNS) yesterday.

Said scored in the 29th, 65th, 66th, 75th and 78th minutes while Arup Reza (42nd), Shimon (36th) and Kayes (39th) netted the other goals. Humayun (67th) and Ujjol (77th) scored the two goals for Azimuddin.

In the second game of the day, Shuti VM Pilot High School defeated Raja Suryakumar Institute 3-1 at the same venue. Shujon Miah (17th) and Sabbir (22nd, 58th) took their team to victory and

Shujon scored the lone goal for Rajain in the 74th minute.

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) coaches panel has selected six top players from the school championship who will be part of BFF's future star program. The selected players are Anik Burman (Laxmi Narayan

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Big wins for Feni, Piul

SPORTS REPORTER

Feni Soccer Club and Piul Smriti Sangsad posted huge wins in the Basundhara Champions Club Cup football tournament yesterday.

The Feni club crushed Chourasta Club of Laxmipur 8-0 with Iqbal hitting the net thrice while Sabuj and Rana scored twice for the winners.

Away in Meherpur, the Jhenidah club also had a field

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Action from yesterday's Citycell National School Football Championship match between Muslimuddin High School of Jhenidah and Azimuddin High School of Kishoreganj at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

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