

Welcome back heroes

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

The victorious Bangladesh cricket team returned home late yesterday from their successful 51-day tour of the West Indies and Zimbabwe to a raucous welcome at the Zia International Airport.

Ministers, board members and officials were joined by a nearly two thousand strong gathering of fans, including numerous close family members of the players, who greeted their heroes with garlands of flowers and joyous chants of "Congratulations" & "Welcome".

Such success is unprecedented in the history of Bangladesh cricket and the mass turnout showcased exactly how much this success means to the people.

Victorious captain Shakib al Hasan, who was thrust into the role following the pull-out of Mashrafe bin Mortaza, was visibly beaming at the press conference.

"We had gone into this series with the hope of just playing good cricket after our disastrous performance in the T20 World Cup, but this achievement is glorious.

"This has come about after two years

of hard work and we are just now bearing the fruits of our labour," said Shakib.

The all-rounder who has led from the front also had a word of warning.

"I would think that our players will go home tonight revelling in this glory but come back tomorrow morning seeking new challenges. As great as this is, we need to put this win behind us and look forward," continued the left-hander.

Wicket-keeper Mushfiqur Rahim, whose sparkling knock sealed the series in Zimbabwe, seconded his captain.

"The victory is the result of an all-round team performance. Everyone did well and this will raise our confidence for continued success."

Mohammad Ashraful, the target of much flak for his subdued performances prior to this tour, managed to hit back at his critics with some good knocks including a century against Zimbabwe.

And the mercurial right-hander appealed to the media for more support for himself and his teammates.

"I am confident that with the support of the fans and the media behind us we can go on to achieve great things. This is a talented squad and the future looks very bright."

Tamim Iqbal who managed the record

of the highest individual ODI score by a Bangladeshi was equally elated.

Terming his innings memorable, he added: "The challenge has just gotten bigger for me. Previously I used to get out in the mid-thirties, but now I am trying to go on to get big scores."

It has been a remarkable month and a half for the Tigers. Having landed in the Caribbean with the tag of underdogs, the Tigers return at the zenith of their standing in the public eye. The scores of screaming fans who lined up to support their heroes was a testament to that fact.

Much has however been made of the quality of the opposition with West Indies fielding a largely second-string side and Zimbabwe lacking their previous bite.

But all-rounder Mahamadullah Riyad put the lid on the issue.

"A win is always sweet, no matter who it comes against" said the talented youngster.

The Tigers completed a Test and ODI series whitewash against West Indies before swatting aside the Zimbabwe side 4-1 in the ODIs.

They are set to pay a courtesy call on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her official residence Jamuna on Saturday at 11 am.

Maruful back at MSC helm

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammedan Sporting Club have reappointed Maruful Haq as their football team coach after a successful harvest in the players' transfer where they roped in country's number one striker Zahid Hossain Emily from bitter rivals Abahani.

Although Maruf failed to win the prestigious B League title for the Black and Whites last year, he won a lot of plaudits for his style of coaching and for lifting the 1 crore Taka Super Cup.

Maruf wanted to leave Mohammedan terming their officials unprofessional. But his reappointment certainly established that fact that how desperate the popular Mitijheel outfit are to dethrone Abahani, who have won the B League twice in a row.

After being reappointed Maruf wanted to get his boys together immediately and Mohammedan, who are still against taking part in the Federation Cup from September 10, complied with it. The club has asked all its registered players to report to the coach on August 23 at the club's Motijheel tent.

Kiwis save follow-on

AFP, Galle

Resolute batting by New Zealand's eighth-wicket pair of Jesse Ryder and Daniel Vettori denied Sri Lanka a follow-on in the first Test here on Thursday.

The duo, who came together with the Black Caps still needing 30 runs to avoid the follow-on in the rain-hit Test, put on a defiant stand of 36 after tea on the third day.

Ryder was dismissed for 42, but skipper Vettori returned unbeaten on 33 as New Zealand ended the day at 281-8, still 171 runs behind Sri Lanka's first innings total of 452.

Tailender Iain O'Brien was the other batsman at the crease on three.

Sri Lanka have two days, weather permitting, to force a win at the Galle International Stadium on a wearing wicket that has already started to assist the spinners.

Just 76 overs were bowled during the day after heavy rain delayed the start by 90 minutes and bad light ended play 20 minutes early.

The Black Caps, led by a gutsy 69 from left-handed opener Tim Mcintosh, were sitting pretty at 180-3 when three wickets fell for 15 runs in the post-lunch session.

The collapse was triggered by two wickets from left-arm seamer Thilan Thushara, who had Ross Taylor caught behind for 35 and bowled Brendon McCullum for one off the

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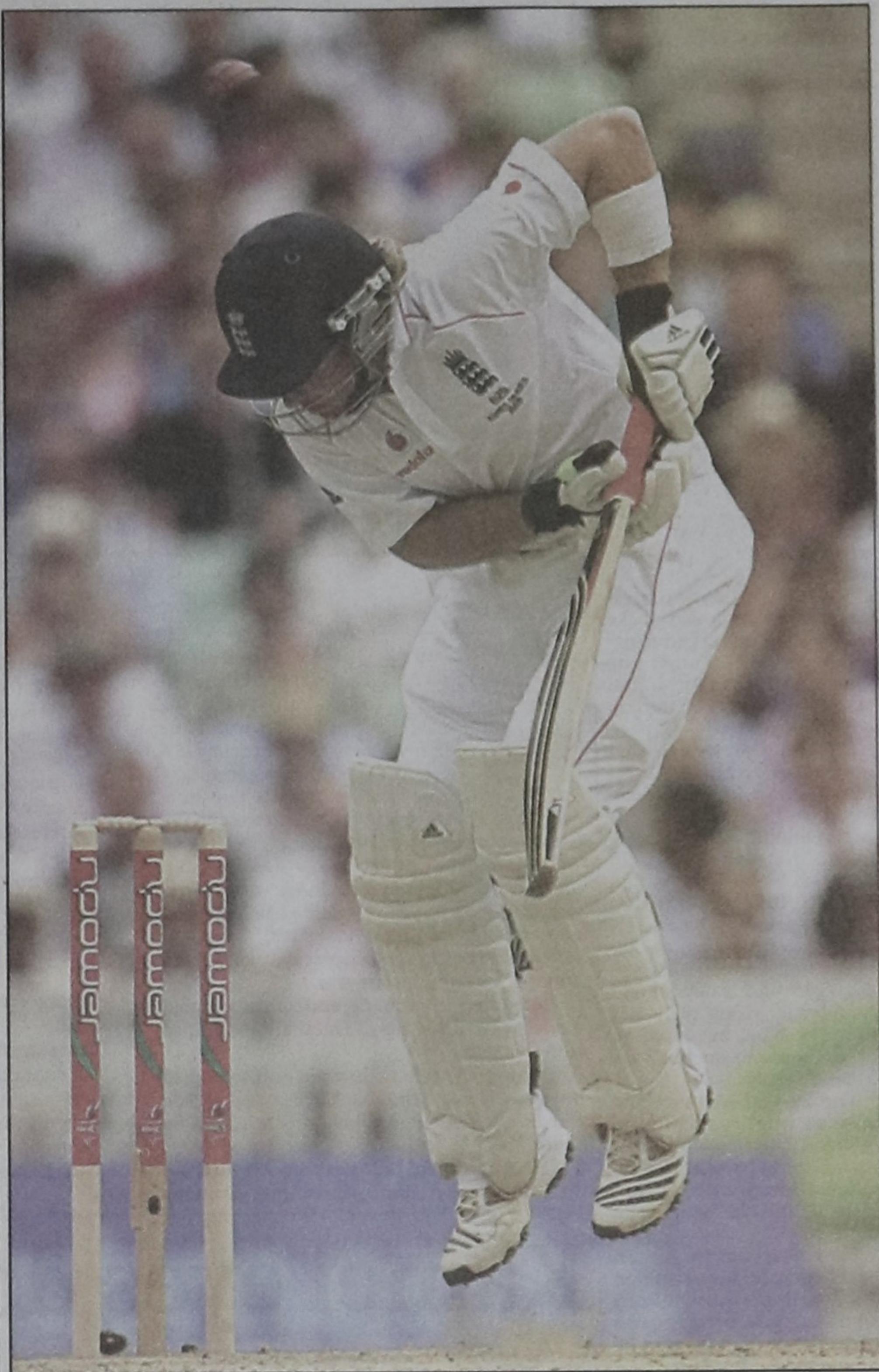


PHOTO: INTERNET

England batsman Ian Bell ducks a short ball on the first day of the fifth and final Ashes Test against Australia at The Oval yesterday.

Bell elevates England

Cricket

AFP, London

Ian Bell held firm as England advanced to 180 for three at tea on the first day of the fifth and decisive Ashes Test at The Oval here on Thursday.

Bell was 72 not out after a second session where England lost both captain Andrew Strauss (55) and Paul Collingwood (24) in a match they had to win to regain the Ashes but one where Australia needed only a draw to retain them.

Test debutant Jonathan Trott, a Warwickshire colleague of Bell's, was unbeaten on three after taking 12 balls to get off the mark.

England were 108 for one at lunch with Strauss, their best batsman in this series, 50 not out and Bell unbeaten on 41.

But in the third over after the interval England lost Strauss when the left-handed opener, diligent in the morning session, limply hung his bat outside off-stump against Ben Hilfenhaus and was caught behind by wicket-keeper Brad Haddin.

Strauss's stand of 102 in 142 balls with Bell

had taken England from 12 for one, following the early loss of Alastair Cook for 10, to 114 for two.

His departure saw the experienced Collingwood come in at number four, one higher than his usual position.

However, with regular No 4 Kevin Pietersen out of the series with an Achilles injury following the second Test and England fielding a newcomer in Trott, in a dropped No 3 Ravi Bopara, Collingwood's promotion made sense.

Collingwood, along with the rest of England's victorious 2005 Ashes side, received the MBE (Member of the British Empire) medal despite appearing only in the Oval Test.

But Collingwood, rarely assured on Thursday, made 24 before slicing paceman Peter Siddle to Michael Hussey in the gully for 24.

England were now 176 for three.

South Africa born Trott avoided a golden duck on his debut by playing a solid forward defensive shot against Siddle, a stroke cheered by England fans.

But it was Bell, much criticised for failing to make runs when England needed them most, who rather than Collingwood or Trott was best placed to deliver the big innings around which a significant total could be built.

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Bangladesh aim big

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh are expecting to win 17 gold medals in the 11th South Asian (SA) Games when the regional Olympic extravaganza takes place here in January-February next year.

This was projected in the first meeting of the SA Games organising committee with its chairman and Finance Minister AMA Muhith present at the NSC Auditorium yesterday.

While briefing the reporters after the meeting, which has approved the sub-committees for a successful holding of the event, Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA) Secretary General Kutubuddin Ahmed said that Bangladesh stand a good chance of winning a handful of gold medals.

"We have set our sight on 80 medals including 17 golds after assessing the performance of the athletes now training at different places," said Kutubuddin.

He also said informed that the organising

committee would soon announce cash awards for winners to achieve the target.

Kutubuddin informed that the NSC, custodian of country's sport, is working round the clock to complete the renovation work in time. Like other occasions, Bangabandhu National Stadium will host the football and athletic events apart from gracing the opening and closing ceremonies.

This is the third time Bangladesh will stage the regional sporting carnival since it was introduced in 1984. Bangladesh last staged the meet in 1993.

The event involving the eight South Asian nations -- India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, Sri Lanka, new entrant Afghanistan and the hosts Bangladesh -- will commence on January 29. The 11-day spectacle that includes 23 disciplines will conclude on February 9.

This is for the first time cricket has been included in the meet along with golf, handball, cycling and ush. The introduction of T20 cricket tournament will certainly add more glamour to the tournament where India have always dominated in terms of winning laurels.

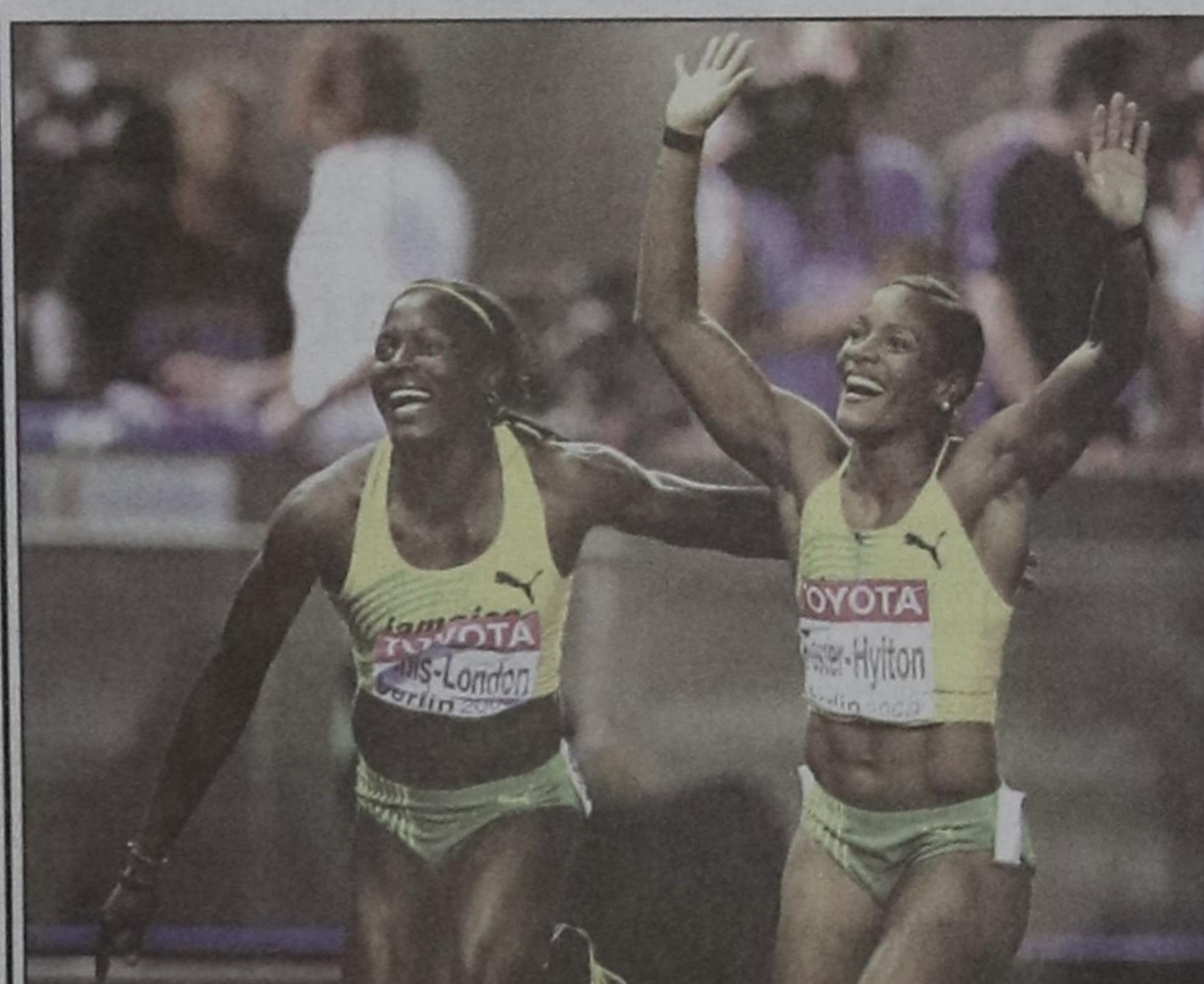


PHOTO: AFP

Jamaica's Brigitte Foster-Hylton (R) celebrates her victory in the 100m hurdles with fellow country-woman Deloreen Ennis-London at the Athletics World Championships in Berlin on Wednesday.

Hylton happy at last

AFP, Berlin

Jamaican veteran Brigitte Foster-Hylton ran a season's best 12.51secs to finally claim gold in the women's 100m hurdles at the world athletics championships on Tuesday.

The 34-year-old, who won world bronze in Helsinki in 2005 and silver in Paris in 2003, finally secured gold at Berlin's Olympic Stadium.

She edged out Canada's Olympic bronze medallist Priscilla Lopes-Schliep who upgraded her bronze in Beijing to a silver here when she ran 12.54secs while Deloreen Ennis-London took third in 12.55.

Foster-Hylton initially danced a jig of delight with Lopes-Schliep when the pair realised they had both medalled, but the Jamaican then slumped to the track as her emotions got the better of her.

"There is a story behind that," explained Foster-Hylton who admitted she was so disillusioned about missing out on a medal in Beijing that only a talk from her coach stopped her retiring after the last Olympics.

"The girls had been running so fast that when I visualised the race, I decided to close my eyes and power through to the finish."

"I actually crossed the line with my eyes closed and it was Priscilla who told me I had won."

That is why I celebrated with her.

"Us Jamaicans have a history of sprinters, we have never had a gold medal at world level at this event, so this is a real pleasure and I embrace that."

"I owe all this to my coach, I was so down and disappointed after coming home from Beijing without a medal that I was ready to retire."

"My coach talked me out of quitting and I must admit I owe all of this to him, otherwise I would not be up here now."

Her delight was in sharp contrast to both Beijing silver-medallist Sally McLellan from Australia and Olympic gold medallist Dawn Harper of the United States.

Harper had earlier scorched into the final with a personal best in Wednesday evenings semi-final when she flew over the hurdles in 12.48sec to throw down the gauntlet to her rivals.

But in the final, two and a half hours later, she could only clock 12.81sec to finish seventh while McLellan finished a disappointing fifth in a time of 12.70sec.

There was delight for Ireland's Derval O'Rourke who ran a new national record of 12.67sec to finish fourth, but just out of the medals.

SA condemns the test

AFP, Johannesburg

South Africa's ruling party Thursday announced new 800-metre world champion Caster Semenya as the nation's "golden girl" while condemning speculation on the runner's gender.

The African National Congress called on South Africans to "rally behind our golden girl and shrug off negative and unwarranted questions about her gender," said ANC spokesman Brian Soko.

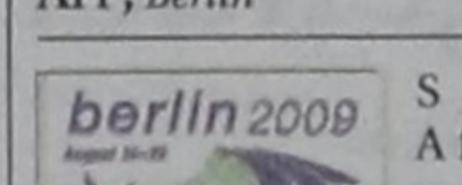
The collapse was triggered by two wickets from left-arm seamer Thilan Thushara, who had Ross Taylor caught behind for 35 and bowled Brendon McCullum for one off the

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Semenya's gender in question

AFP, Berlin

berlin 2009



South Africa's newly-crowned women's 800 metres world champion Caster Semenya must undergo a gender test, the sport's governing body the IAAF announced on Wednesday.

The 18-year-old has been a revelation this year first domestically, where she vastly improved her times at 800m and 1500m, and also here where she romped to the title trouncing defending champion Janeth Jepkosgei by over two-and-a-half seconds.

Semenya did not attend a post-race press conference; IAAF secretary general Pierre Weiss took her place.

"I am replacing the winner here tonight. A double investigation is being conducted - one in South Africa, one in Berlin," said Weiss.

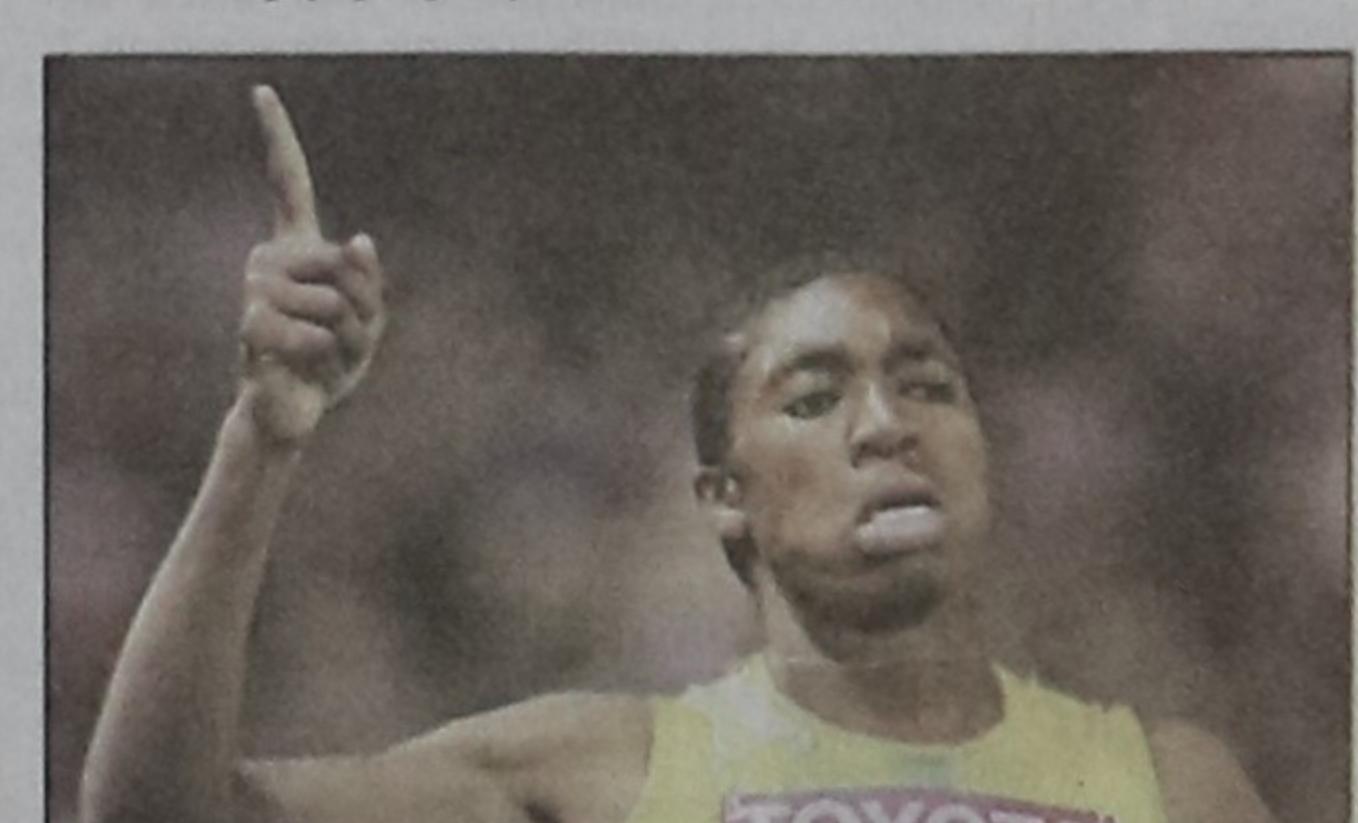
He reiterated that the outcome of the gender test would not be known for sometime.

"I am not a doctor, but all

the doctors who conducted investigations tell me this sort of thing takes weeks or months," said Weiss.

Weiss insisted that it was not fair to put such a young and inexperienced athlete up in front of the press.

"We know you want to talk to her, but she is young, she is inexperienced and she is not able to reply properly to all



South Africa's Caster Semenya exults after winning the women's 800m race in the Athletics World Championships in Berlin on Wednesday.