



Bangladesh football team manager Satyajit Das Rupu (C) holds a memento presented by Emirates' head of operations Dhaka AKM Junaied (2nd from R) during a reception awarded to the eight participating teams of Bangabandhu SAFF Championship at Pan Pacific Sonargaon hotel yesterday.

## Thorpe backs struggling KP

Cricket

AFP, London

Graham Thorpe believes England star batsman Kevin Pietersen is on the brink of finding his best form after struggling so far in his native South Africa.

Pietersen made his name in world cricket five years ago by scoring three one-day centuries in his homeland.

However, he has found runs hard to come by since returning from four months on the sidelines with an Achilles injury and he has yet to make a fifty during England's ongoing tour of South Africa.

England will now head into the first of a four-Test series starting next week with Pietersen, dismissed for 25 in a warm-up match on Wednesday, struggling for runs.

But they won the Ashes without the 29-year-old, ruled out of this year's series with Australia after just two Tests, and former England batsman Thorpe believes it is just a matter of time before Pietersen, who averages nearly fifty in Test cricket, comes good again.

"Once he gets into an innings he'll be fine," said Thorpe, speaking at an

power urban cricket event at Lord's on Wednesday.

"It could be in one of these warm-up games," added left-hander Thorpe, whose own Test career came to an end when he was dropped by England in 2005 in a move that allowed Pietersen to make his debut in the five-day format against Australia at Lord's.

"He only needs one score -- a 50 or 60 with two or three hours at the crease just to really focus his mind again.

"That's all a person like him needs. He's a big match player with a lot of quality and you just feel that when he does get back he won't be lacking strength or desire against South Africa, that's for sure."

As was the case in 2004, Pietersen has been booed by some South African spectators during this tour.

But Thorpe said he had the strength of character to cope with the taunts while the arrival of former England captain Graham Gooch, one of the most prolific run-scorers of his generation, as the squad's batting coach would help iron out any technical issues.

"The booing is something he's used to," said Thorpe, who played in exactly 100 Tests. "It's the country of his birth so he'll look to impress and do well for

England.

"Graham Gooch is out there working with them now. He can help them by focusing their minds on the mental side of the game and getting them in to score big runs."

Thorpe was far more concerned by whether England would be able to dismiss their opponents twice, something any side must do if it wants to win a Test match, especially against a South Africa side that boasts a powerful batting order.

England paceman James Anderson was ruled out Wednesday of a warm-up match against a South African Invitational XI with a knee injury and he has already had several pain-killing injections ahead of next week's first Test at Centurion.

Anderson was a key figure in England's recent 2-1 one-day series win over South Africa and Thorpe said: "Anderson's absence will be a big blow because you need the new ball swinging so England will have to work out which way they'll go, whether they have to go with (Graham) Onions or (Ryan) Sidebottom."

"The fear is that England will not be able to take 20 wickets and that's going to be England's hardest task," Thorpe added. "We look a little bit light there."

## Obstacle removed for Pak IPL players

AFP, Islamabad

Four Pakistani players have received clearance to get their visas to travel to neighbouring India to feature in the lucrative Indian Premier League, the nation's cricket chief said Thursday.

"Our High Commissioner in New Delhi has confirmed that four Pakistani players -- Umar Gul, Sohail Tanvir, Misbahul Haq and Kamran Akmal -- have got clearance to get visas," said Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman Ijaz Butt.

But IPL official Lalit Modi had announced Tuesday that players from across the border would miss the third edition of the Indian Premier League (IPL 2010) because they did not get their visas before a deadline.

Butt said he would talk to Modi to try and get him to reconsider.

"I hope they will consider this latest development," Butt told AFP.

Modi had ruled out Pakistani players' participation in the league after the Monday deadline for completing all formalities including obtaining visas for the March 12 to April 25 event elapsed.

Eleven Pakistani players -- Gul, Kamran, Tanvir, Misbah, Younus Khan, Shahid Afridi, Shoaib Akhtar, Mohammad Asif, Shoaib Malik, Salman Butt and Mohammad Hafeez -- featured in the first edition of the IPL in 2008.

Pakistani players were then denied permission by Islamabad to play in the second edition earlier this year due to growing political tensions with India after the November 2008 attacks on India's financial hub Mumbai.

The PCB said last week that Islamabad had granted permission to the players to take part in the third season of the IPL, but the delay in securing Indian visas created an obstacle.

The IPL retained the contracts of Gul, Tanvir, Misbah and Kamran, while the contracts of seven other players were terminated.

All-rounder Abdul Razzaq, who featured in the rival unofficial Indian Cricket League in 2007 and 2008 before abandoning it this year, won a contract with Kolkata Knight Riders and can also get a visa clearance, officials said.

## Kiwis bank

FROM PAGE 17  
that I have taken into all my batting displays.

Batting at No.6 in ODIs has helped a bit, and I realize my role a bit more.

If I can do that, it gives us a nice all-round option." In the event that New Zealand go in with four seamers, Tim Southee, who came in as a replacement for Shane Bond in the squad, is likely to play his first game of the series, while Jeetan Patel remains the spinning option.

Grant Elliott, Vettori said, was struggling from a knee injury and a final decision on his place will be taken just before the match.

With the inclusion of BJ Watling as opener, Daniel Flynn could be expected to drop down the order.

Four of the last five Tests in Napier have ended in a draw, but Vettori felt the track this time had more to offer for the bowlers.

"The curator has worked hard on putting a bit more pace in it and wants it to be a touch livelier than in the past," he said.

"He said everywhere there's a new ball taken, there's a bit in it."

"We've played on some tough decks in the past; the balance will be a lot more even in this game." The toss, Vettori added, would not be vital.

"With the grass cover on it, it will be pretty consistent throughout the Test," he said.

"The new ball will play its part through the five days hopefully, which is what you want and then it turns into a good batting deck." Only Ross Taylor in the top order has managed to measure up to the accuracy and persistence of Pakistan's bowlers, and Vettori admitted his batsmen were under pressure to perform, but did not require an overhaul in their technique.

"They are under a bit of pressure."

Sometimes in these situations you try to reinvent your game and they just need a 5 to 10 percent improvement," he said.

## 'Aussies are beatable'

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Chris Gayle, the West Indies captain, has declared Australia are "very beatable" ahead of the Perth Test and said their batting was not as strong as in recent years. Gayle was the man-of-the-match in the draw at Adelaide Oval and his team will be aiming to level the series 1-1 when the third and final Test begins on Wednesday.

They are in that position because of an excellent performance in Adelaide, where they had a realistic chance on the final day of being the first West Indies side to win a Test in Australia since Courtney Walsh's team in 1996-97. Gayle said Ricky Ponting's side of 2009-10 was very different to Australian teams he had faced in the past.

"The Aussies still have a lot of quality players and they are still a strong unit, but I am sure they are very beatable," Gayle wrote in his column in Australia's News Ltd papers. "There is no doubt we really pushed them in Adelaide and had them under a lot of pressure for long periods of the second Test. It was a shame we couldn't quite finish them off, but they do have quite a long batting line-up."

"Having said that, Aussie sides I have played before have had much bigger and stronger batting line-ups. Their bowling attack is also

not very experienced -- Mitchell Johnson is a good bowler, but it might say something that he is easily their most seasoned quick."

Gayle praised his own players for the character they displayed after a "terrible" performance in losing the Gabba Test in three days. He said every player stood up, including the young fast bowler Kumar Roach, who Ricky Ponting has already conceded will be tough to face on the WACA pitch.

"Kumar Roach will be a huge handful with his pace on the bouncy pitch," Gayle wrote. "I think we will see something extraordinary from him. Trust me, he has some serious wheels. I really don't like facing him in the nets -- usually I have to tell him to slow things down so I can see the ball!"

"Ricky Ponting is a top-class and experienced player, but Kumar really ruffled him and hustled him with sheer pace in Adelaide. Kumar won't back down against Ricky in Perth and will ask even more questions of the Aussie captain on a pitch I hear should be very quick and bouncy."

West Indies are unlikely to make any changes to their side for the Perth Test following their impressive showing in Adelaide. Australia are waiting to find out if Peter Siddle recovers from a hamstring strain, with the Victoria fast bowler Clint McKay in line for a Test debut if Siddle does not prove his fitness.

## Should Woods follow Beckham?

Golf

INTERNET, undated

Tiger Woods can repair the damage done to his public image by allegations of multiple affairs, according to a leading golf agent who cited the example of footballer David Beckham as evidence.

Woods' reputation has been battered in recent weeks by claims from at least 10 women they had affairs with him.

This has led to suggestions the American golf great, a 14-times Major winner, risks losing a series of highly lucrative endorsements that have helped make him a billionaire.

But Briton Andrew 'Chubby' Chandler, head of the International Sports Management group which looks after golfers Ernie Els, Lee Westwood and Darren Clarke, as well as cricketer Andrew Flintoff, said Woods could restore his image.

"It will take time to repair, but I think it's doable. Time is a great healer," Chandler said. It was in 2004 that England football star Beckham was confronted by newspaper allegations of an extra-marital affair.

However, his pop star wife Victoria, formerly a member of British group the Spice Girls, stood by him.

Beckham has since gone on to play for in the United States for the LA Galaxy and such is the midfielder's standing in the global game he is considered vital to England's hopes of staging the 2018 World Cup.

"Beckham is the only one I can liken Woods to. He went through pretty much the same thing and it passed in about nine months," said Chandler.

"Now he's a super-hero again who might single-handedly bring the World Cup to England."

"Beckham had a very strong wife who stood by him. The circumstances with Tiger might be different, but I think he'll get his life back on track."

"I don't think Tiger will ever be able to be as private as he was, though. He's got to be more accessible from now on and so become a little bit more real."

News reports on Wednesday said Woods' wife Elin Nordegren, a Swedish former model, had moved out of the couple's family home in Florida.

Revelations about Woods' private life started to come to light after he crashed his car outside his home on November 27.

This prompted media speculation the crash was caused by an argument with Nordegren over a reported affair with New York night club hostess Rachel Uchitel.

## Hosts look

FROM PAGE 17

"We had a lack of preparation, but this area is now covered by playing three matches, but the injury is the part with Jagpreet and Manish handicapped and we are hoping to field four out of six who did not play against Maldives versus Bangladesh. I believe the boys are ready to take the challenge," said Singh.

Singh also rated the opponents highly. "We respect Bangladesh, who have a balanced good side. They can score and defend it well, but we are also a side capable of fighting against them."

Bangladesh coach Shahidur Rahman Shanto hinted that they might stick to their winning combination in the semifinal clash.



## Did U Know?

Bayern Munich won their first title in 1909, as champions of the Bavarian League.



Shahid Afridi (Pakistan all-rounder)

"We are world champions of Twenty20 cricket and the whole world wants to see us play, including the Indian fans who ask us about our participation."

Reacting to news that Pakistani players will miss the third edition of the Indian Premier League (IPL) due to a delay in securing visas for the Twenty20 event in India.

## Kalabagan down Biman

FROM PAGE 17

knock as he struck eight boundaries and two sixes to guide his side towards victory. Two more wickets fell in the process, but Mushfiqur held firm and finished not out on 84 off just 63 deliveries to see Biman chase down the target with 8 balls to spare and three wickets in hand.

Biman and Kalabagan were tied on 16 points before the start of the Super League, so it was sweet revenge for the Biman winning against Kalabagan and replacing them at number three.

Shakib Al Hasan turned in an all-round performance to help defending champions Abahani to an easy 7-wicket win over Victoria at BKSP. Shakib Al Hasan took four wickets conceding just 11 runs in his six overs to bundle out Victoria for a paltry 108 in 25.4 overs. Victoria all-rounder Abul Bashar's 23 was the highest score of the innings. Abahani easily chased down this small target in 20.5 overs losing 3 wickets, all those three falling to Abul Bashar. Imrul Kayes scored 42 while Shakib remained not out on 34 to earn him the man-of-the-match award.

Abahani's perennial rivals and current leaders Mohammedan too had an easy outing against Cricket

Coaching School (CCS) as they won by six wickets in the 34-over-a-side match at Fatullah. Batting first, CCS posted 142 before getting all out in the last ball of the innings. Mohammedan's Pakistani all-rounder Navedul Hasan proved the wrecker-in-chief with a 4-for giving away 35 runs. Nizamuddin's 40 was the highest for CCS. Nizamuddin did his best with the ball as he took two wickets, but Mohammedan had much more quality to deal with as they chased down the target with four overs to spare and six wickets in hand. Former opening batsman of the national team Nafees Iqbal scored an unbeaten half-century while Mohammad Ashraful scored 46 to turn it into an easy chase.

## BRIEF SCORES

### KALABAGAN-BIMAN

KALABAGAN: 201 for 8 in 27 overs (Nazmus Sadat 56, Rokibul Hasan 41, Shafiu Alam 3-35)

BIMAN: 202 for 3 in 25.4 overs (Mushfiqur Rahim 84 not out, Avishek Mitra 42; Nazmus Sadat 1-41)

Result: Biman won by 7 wickets

### ABAHANI-VICTORIA

VICTORIA: 108 all out in 25.4 overs (Abul Bashar 23, Kamrul

Islam 17; Shakib Al Hasan 4-11, Mohammad Rafique 2-14)

ABAHANI: 110 for 3 in 20.5 overs (Imrul Kayes 42, Shakib Al Hasan 34; Abul Bashar 3-26)

Result: Abahani won by 7 wickets

MOHAMMEDAN-CRICKET COACHING SCHOOL: 152 all out in 34 overs (Nazmul Hossain 29, Nizamuddin Ripon 40; Navedul Hasan 4-35, Saqlain Sajid 2-22)

MOHAMMEDAN: 155 for 4 in 30 overs (Mohammad Ashraful 46, Nafees Iqbal 56 not out; Nizamuddin Ripon 2-26, Refatuzzaman 2-19)

Result: Mohammedan won by 6 wickets

## GP appears

FROM PAGE 17  
who paid Taka 6.5 crore last time that expired in October, offered Taka 7 crore this time around. The figure was understandable in the context of the worldwide economic meltdown.

However, it was learnt that Grameenphone, who has been a development partner of the BCB for a long time, is keen to stay close to the heart of the Bangladesh's brand ambassadors.

Chathura. "They are a very good side but I am confident our full strength backbone will be able to manage the trio of Maldives strikers."

Sri Lanka captain Chathura and Maldives captain Ashfaq Ali play together for Maldives Radiant in the Maldives league. Besides Sri Lankan players Kasun Jayasuriya and EB Channa have also experience of playing with Maldives players.

After lifting the title of second SAARC Gold Cup, which later turned into the SAFF Championship, Sri Lanka have not reached the final but they are looking to end the drought this time around.

"We lost to them in the semifinal during the last edition, but this is not a revenge match for us. Our motto is to win the match and go through to the final," said Sri Lanka trainer Sumith Walpola, who has been a coach in Maldives for ten years.

and India to qualify for the last four and their captain Ashfaq Ali, Ahmed Thoriq and Fazeel Ibrahim were the central roles behind the inspirational performance.

After confirming the semifinal berths with two victories in a row, Sri Lanka rested six players against Bangladesh keeping the semifinal clash in mind and now they want to cash in on their fresh legs.

"Our morale is high after qualifying for the semifinal by winning two successive matches and we did not put our full strength squad out in the last match because we kept six players in on the bench to use them in the semifinal," said Sri Lanka captain Chathura Mathu ranga, who was also given rest along with Lankesara, Sohinhkumar, Sanjeev, Duddley and Asmeer.

"The match between Sri Lanka and Maldives is always a big game and no one wants to lose to each other," said

Chathura. "They are a very good side but I am confident our full strength backbone will be able to manage the trio of Maldives strikers."

Sri Lanka captain Chathura and Maldives captain Ashfaq Ali play together for Maldives Radiant in the Maldives league. Besides Sri Lankan players Kasun Jayasuriya and EB Channa have also experience of playing with Maldives players.

After lifting the title of second SAARC Gold Cup, which later turned into the SAFF Championship, Sri Lanka have not reached the final but they are looking to end the drought this time around.

"We lost to them in the semifinal during the last edition, but this is not a revenge match for us. Our motto is to win the match and go through to the final," said Sri Lanka trainer Sumith Walpola, who has been a coach in Maldives for ten years.

## Battle of islanders

FROM PAGE 17

Maldives have defeated Sri Lanka five times in the previous 14 meetings and went down three times while the results remained unsettled the other six times.

Bela doesn't think the previous record as well as playing in the same league would have any role in deciding the result.

"Every game is unique and different and I think the record will not have any impact on the game though it can motivate the players," Bela said. "Sri Lankan players play for the Maldives domestic league, not for the national team and playing in national team and club is totally different."

The Hungarian coach is, however, worried over the role of referees and is expecting good refereeing in the semifinal match.

After having played a 1-1 draw against Nepal, Maldives bounced back to win both games against Afghanistan