



Indian star Harbhajan Singh finds himself on the end of a traditional Bangladeshi welcome upon his arrival at the Zia International Airport yesterday. India arrived to take part in the tri-nation ODI series also involving Sri Lanka which gets underway January 4.

PHOTO: STAR

Sehwag issues a warning

Cricket

BISHWAJIT ROY

A buoyant India cricket team arrived in Dhaka yesterday with a promise to start their campaign in the New Year with same sort of form they have been maintaining over the last two years.

After a successful home series against Sri Lanka, the other opponents in the tri-nation tournament besides hosts Bangladesh, Mahendra Singh Dhoni's side start the competition as clear favourites as their staggering batting line-up put them ahead of their opponents.

Understandably the Indian players were found in jovial mood at the Zia International Airport and the short duration of the tour even made them happier. It was not captain Dhoni but dashing

opener Virender Sehwag who turned to the media to make it clear that they came here to continue their splendid run of form.

The India vice-captain however showed every respect to their opponents no matter that Sri Lanka have been missing some of their key players and Bangladesh have yet to be a big name in the World Cricket fraternity though the Tigers have got the potential to surprise any team. But Sehwag said they are focussed on their job.

"Our target is just to play good cricket. You know for the last two years we have been playing very tough and good cricket and hopefully we will maintain it in 2010 also," Sehwag expressed his team's sentiment.

The 31-year-old prolific right-hander also said that the current India cricket team, which now holds the number one

position in Test rankings, was little bothered about the rankings rather their main focus was to perform consistently.

"We are not worried about the number one or number two positions, we just came here to play good cricket and hopefully we will do that and win the series here. And if we can do so then the rankings will look after itself," he said.

"It's important for the team to play well consistently. If you do that you will stay there in number one or number two positions," added the Delhi batsman who so far played 72 Tests and 216 ODIs.

Sehwag is well aware about the conditions in Bangladesh and said that the dew could be a major factor in the day-night affairs at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

"I think whenever you play in the subcontinent you will get the same kind

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Tickets at GP outlets

SPORTS REPORTER

Tickets for the Idea Cup tri-nation tournament involving India, Sri Lanka and hosts Bangladesh will be available at all Grameenphone outlets.

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) yesterday confirmed it in a press release and they also gave the rates of the tickets for the tri-nation tourney which will kick off with the match between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka on January 4 at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

All matches are day-night fixtures at the same venue.

In the double-header competition, India will take on Sri Lanka in the second match of the competition on January 5 and January 10 while Bangladesh take on India on January 7 and January 11. The Tigers will play their second match against Sri Lanka on January 8.

The final is billed for January 13.

TICKET RATES

GALLERY - Tk 200.00 for first six matches & Tk 300.00 for final

SPECIAL ENCLOSURE - Tk 400.00 for first six matches & Tk 500.00 for final

CLUB HOUSE - Tk 500.00 for first six matches & Tk 600.00 for final

VIP GRAND STAND - Tk 2000.00 for first six matches & Tk 2500.00 for final.

DRS won't be in place for India Tests

PTI, Mumbai

The International Cricket Council (ICC) may be upbeat about the effectiveness of the Decision Referral System (DRS) but apparently has not been able to convince the boards to accept it.

While India skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni was unsure whether the controversial DRS would be in place during the two-Test series against Bangladesh later this month, a Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) employee indicated it would not be in use.

Queried about it during Friday's press conference on the eve of the team's departure for Bangladesh, Dhoni said "I'm not sure" and looked for help from BCCI's corporate relations manager

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Gautam does envy Veeru

PTI, New Delhi

Opening the innings with Virender Sehwag has its own peril since the right-hander makes batting look ridiculously easy but Gautam Gambhir believes he still manages to hold his own because he doesn't try to match his partner shot by shot.

In an interview with PTI before leaving for the tri-series in Bangladesh, Gambhir shared his batting philosophy which revolves around his own strength, rather than his partner's influence.

"I just try to be myself. I know areas where I'm strong at and play accordingly, rather than thinking what Sehwag is

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DC Gold Cup

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sathkira

Jessore won the opening match of Khulna DC Gold Cup football tournament with a 4-1 tie-break success against host Sathkira much to the disappointment of a modest home crowd at the Sathkira Stadium on Saturday.

The match rolled into shootout after the regulation 90 minutes ended in a goalless draw.

Ten teams are taking part in the knockout tournament.

Earlier, Cabinet Secretary M Abdul Aziz inaugurated the tournament as chief guest at a colourful ceremony. Chairman of the sponsors Shahjalal Islami Bank Touhidur Rahman was also present on the occasion.



Straight Drive

SPORTS REPORTER

There is hardly any time for international cricketers to spend quality moments with the family and dear ones during festival times but the Indian players would be thankful that at least they got to spend the new year's arrival at home. It is not the playing aspect but the travelling that is most tiresome and it is good that the BCCI has a chartered flight for both teams whenever there is a series in India for it not only saves time but also all the hassle of baggage etc. The Indians and the Lankans play a tri-series in Bangladesh and luckily the travel time there is not much and as far as the Indians are concerned there won't be much travelling done there either since there will be matches only at two venues.

Having played each other over the last couple of months the Indians and the Lankans know each other's strengths and weaknesses quite well, so the matches between them will be close games. It is Bangladesh who could well be the spoke in the wheel. The hosts have a few problems with their designated skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza still not fit after his injury but they have an enthusiastic team and they tend to thrive under the fanatical local support. They have had a good series against a Zimbabwe team and are always a dangerous team in limited overs cricket. Shakib Al Hassan, Mohammad Ashraful will be the main guys but there are some youngsters who may take the visitors by surprise.

India will be without Tendulkar which means the old firm of Sehwag and Gambhir will open again. The Indian batting remains strong and with Zaheer and Nehra looking good, the new ball also is in good hands. Harbhajan and Jadeja are doing a top job with the spin bowling but as always it's the fielding that is the worry.

The Lankans have omitted Jayasuriya from their team and that could well mean the end of a glorious career. Upul Tharanga grabbed his chance in India and score fluently and that may well have sealed Jayasuriya's fate. Tharanga and Dilshan make as destructive a pair as any seen in limited overs cricket and on the flat Bangladesh pitches they should prosper. The Lankans have made more than one change in their squad after the losses in India and it's a chance for the replacements to come good. These

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Idea are title sponsors

SPORTS REPORTER

Idea, an Indian mobile company, has won the bragging rights as the title sponsor of both the tri-nation one-day tournament and the two-Test series between Bangladesh and India.

The one-day tournament involving India, Sri Lanka and hosts Bangladesh will be branded as 'IDEA CUP 2010'. However, the name of the two-Test series will be announced later.

Idea bought the title sponsorship right from AdTouch, a Bangladeshi marketing agent who originally won whole sponsorship right from the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) for US dollars 826,360 which is equivalent to Taka 57,845,200.

"AdTouch has earned the sponsorship rights of the one-day international tournament, the Test series and two other packages as the highest bidder," said BCB's marketing and commercial committee chairman Aziz Al Kaiser Tito at a press conference at Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

He also said that AdTouch would provide another US dollars 53,000 as prize money, which includes both BCB and players' share and other relevant prizes.

A player hitting the fastest fifty in the one-day tournament will receive \$14,000 while the Super Six hitter will also get the same cash award.

Yousuf not in favour of a fielding coach

CRICINFO, Sydney

Mohammad Yousuf believes hiring a specialist fielding coach for Pakistan will not make much of a difference to the side's continued problems in the area. Pakistan dropped five catches in all in their 170-run loss to Australia at the MCG.

That came on the back of the Test series in New Zealand where they grassed at least ten chances through the three Tests, including six in the win in Wellington.

The performance has prompted speculation in Pakistan that hiring a specialist fielding coach is on the cards. Waqar Younis, the former fast bowler, is already with the squad as a bowling and fielding coach, but he has only been appointed for the Australia series. In any case the brunt of his work lies in the fast bowling department.

BANGLADESH LEAGUE Feni's 2nd win

SPORTS REPORTER

A brace from substitute Ashraful Quader Manju gave newcomers Feni Soccer Club their second triumph in the Citycell Bangladesh League with a 2-1 win over struggling Muktiyoddha Sangsad at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

Shahajuddin Tipu struck the lone goal for Muktiyoddha Sangsad, who suffered five straight defeats to stay at the bottom of the table while Feni Soccer Club raised their points tally to seven from five matches.

Muktiyoddha Sangsad, who had earlier suffered defeats against Brothers, Sheikh Russel, Mohammedan and Abahani, got off to a fine start as expected with striker Tipu putting the All Reds ahead in 12th minute as the former Abahani striker did not hesitate to give his side a lead

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Nazmul out, Shahadat in

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh made one change to the 15-member squad for the tri-nation tournament also involving India and Sri Lanka as pace bowler Nazmul Hossain has been ruled out due to muscle injury.

Lanky paceman Shahadat Hossain has replaced Nazmul in the team.

Nazmul has suffered a right quadriceps muscle injury during practice yesterday and is likely to be out of action for two weeks.

The injury of Nazmul apparently brightened the chance for paceman Shafiqul Islam to make his international debut. Nazmul was the automatic choice in the absence of Mashrafe Bin Mortaza because of his ability to control his bowling.

Injury is big concern for the Bangladesh team in recent times as pace spearhead Mashrafe Bin Mortaza has been out of action since last July due to knee injury while opener Tamim Iqbal,

wicketkeeper Mushfiqur Rahim, ICL-returnee Aftab Ahmed, left-arm pacer Syed Rasel just recovered from injury to make the team.

Dashing left-handed batsman Tamim has played only one match in the recently concluded Premier League but the team management is confident that the lack of match practice will not be a big factor for the Chittagonian.

Rather it seems that there have been some discussions over who would be the second opener; Shahriar Nafees or Imrul Kayes?

Nafees has been out of international cricket for the last fifteen months following his involvement in the unapproved Indian Cricket League (ICL) but he played some good cricket in the Premier League to get the national call again.

Kayes has some more advantage as the left-hander was the highest run-getter in the coveted domestic competition as well as being well integrated with the current squad.

Everybody is looking forward to see whether two ICL-returnees Nafees and Aftab Ahmed can make it to the final eleven when Bangladesh play the opening game against Sri Lanka on January 4 at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

Pakistan's Aamer blow Sydney Test starts today

Cricket

CRICINFO, Sydney

Pakistan's New Year has begun with a setback. Mohammad Aamer, who bagged a five-for at the MCG and was, by far, his team's best bowler, has been ruled out of the SCG Test that starts today due to a groin injury.

The blow deprives Pakistan of a potent fast-bowling force that they would have heavily banked on in their attempt to level the series.

However, there is still room for hope. Were it not for a bungled selection move and a series of turfed first-innings catches, Pakistan might well have provided Australia a sterner challenge in the Boxing Day Test. Aamer's new-ball partner Mohammad Asif and off-spinner Saeed Ajmal were for the most part a disciplined unit at the MCG, but were undermined by a poor fielding display and the unthreatening bowling of Abdur Rauf.

For Pakistan, the New Year's Test represents an opportunity for a fresh start after a depressing 2009 campaign which saw them cast as cricketing nomads following the decision, based on security advice, to strip them of host venue status. The SCG was the site of their last victory over Australia 15 years ago, and the expected reintroduction of Danish Kaneria into

the attack should provide them with added pep.

Australia, on the other hand, produced one of their finest all-round displays in the post-Warne-McGrath era. The evolution of Shane Watson and Simon Katich as a potent opening combination, the maturation of Mitchell Johnson and Doug Bollinger in their respective old- and new-ball roles and the rise of Nathan Hauritz auger well for a new decade and the varied challenges it will bring.

Mitchell Johnson found his groove as a first-change specialist towards the end of a tumultuous 2009 campaign. His pace, bounce and reverse swing with the old ball at the MCG proved harassing for Pakistan's batsmen, and served as the perfect foil for fast bowling counterparts Bollinger and Peter Siddle. The recognition may have gone the way of Hauritz following his maiden five-wicket haul, but Johnson's match figures of 6 for 82 from 40 overs were the most prolific and economical of the Australian attack.

Kaneria proved his workman-like qualities with his first visit to the SCG, claiming 7 for 188 from 49.3 challenging overs in the first innings against a rampant Australian batting line-up. Now recovered from the finger injury that ruled him out of the Melbourne Test,

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Transcom strengthens ties

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Transcom Beverage has strengthened its bond with country's cricket when the franchise of world famous soft drink Pepsi became the official beverage partner of the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) for the next two years.

The agreement was signed at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday on the eve of the tri-series that kicks off tomorrow.

Transcom Beverage won the rights with a lucrative offer of Taka 30 lakh as royalty fee.

"Transcom Beverage Limited has received exclusive pouring right for aerated soft drinks, colas, juices or energy drinks at all international and domestic matches under BCB in Bangladesh," said marketing and commercial committee vice-president of BCB Farhad Hossain

at a press conference after the signing ceremony.

He also added that Transcom Beverage would also provide squeezed drinking water bottles, branded drink trolleys, fridges, branded cool box, branded T-shirt for grounds-men in each international series.

In return, Transcom Beverage will get perimeter boards, hospitality seats in all international and domestic matches and will also get the opportunity on umbrellas used by the journalists and TV cameraman.

"Pepsi has been with cricket for long globally. However after an interval Pepsi resumed its bond with Bangladesh cricket last year by making national cricketers Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, Shakib Al Hasan and Mohammad Ashraful as its brand ambassadors," said an elated Khurshid Irfan Chowdhury, general manager of Transcom Beverage Ltd.

He also hoped that this journey with

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PHOTO: STAR

Nizamuddin Chowdhury (2nd from R), acting CEO of BCB and Khurshid Irfan Chowdhury, general manager, Transcom Beverage Ltd shake hands upon agreeing a deal at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.



TEN Sports
South Africa v England
Third Test, Day One
Live from 2:30pm
STAR Cricket
Australia v Pakistan
Second Test, Day Two
Live from 5:30am (Monday)



Bangladesh League
Abahani v Rahmatganj
Venue: Kamalapur Stadium
Time: 2:45pm