



Bangladesh coach Jamie Siddons (R) and skipper Shakib Al Hasan share a smile during a practice session at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong yesterday.

Sehwag counts Tigers out

BISHWAJIT ROY from Chittagong

Will it be a battle between the Gulliver and Lilliput when world's number one team India take on bottom-side Bangladesh in the first match of the two-Test series in the port city today? One may argue that cricket is a game of uncertainty. But when a player like Virender Sehwag draws the comparison like this, things are bound to heat up.

India captain MS Dhoni, who is not playing this Test for a back strain, didn't turn up to attend the pre-match briefing after a practice session and his deputy Sehwag put on a gloomy face only to stir up the atmosphere ahead of the first Test in a pleasant weather at the port city.

The way the dashing Delhi right-hander responded to questions to dismiss their opponents, it looked like a tornado had just hit the tiny press conference room of the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium yesterday. Like his batting he was as ruthless as he could be in his comments while talking about the strengths and weaknesses of the Tigers in the longer-version cricket, no matter that Shakib Al Hasan's men go into the series on the back of a 2-0 series victory in the West Indies six months back, and that created a hullabaloo among the reporters includ-

ing the visiting journalists.

One should not take anything for granted in cricket and thus can't predict what will happen out in the middle, but the Indian vice-captain didn't seem to have any doubt about the outcome of the series as he hardly showed any respect for the Bangladesh team in Test cricket. Rather Sehwag said that their focus would be only on their individual game.

"In one-day game they can surprise anybody but not in Test matches. It's an ordinary side.

"I don't think so that they have the ability to cause any upset. There's nothing changed in our attitude, in our thinking about how to play a Test match against Bangladesh and we are preparing for Test match and we are ready for it," Sehwag responded when asked about their opponents.

"It's difficult for Bangladesh to take 20 Indian wickets. The kind of batting line up we have I don't think so. Even Sri Lanka can't do that. So, it's very, very difficult for Bangladesh. It's not our confidence rather it's the reality. We are confident that we can bat well all around Bangladesh," he added.

"It doesn't matter," was the brief answer when he was reminded that Bangladesh were very close to victory against then number one team Australia during the first Test at the Fatullah Cricket

Stadium in 2007.

He was however little bit modest when asked about their ranking. "We are playing a Test match tomorrow, we are not thinking that we are number one, number two or number three. Yes we have a Test match against Bangladesh and we have to do well to win the Test match. Our record in Bangladesh is very good. We won, I think, four Test matches out of five in Bangladesh. So hopefully we will do well."

"We are not worried or thinking about opposition. We have to do what we need to do. So we are preparing ourselves and doesn't matter we are playing against Bangladesh or anybody else. We have to play well, we have to put up our individual performances and our job is to play well," he added.

There has been much talking about the Indian bowling attack but Sehwag has full faith in their bowlers: "They are all very good bowlers, they can win Test matches for India."

Considering the strength of the Bangladesh team, especially the inexperienced bowling attack one might say that there was nothing wrong in the Sehwag's statements, but there was a debate whether he showed the decency in his comments.

At the end of the day the onus is on the Jamie Siddons's charges to prove him wrong, or right.

None is invincible: Shakib

First Test against India begins today

BISHWAJIT ROY from Chittagong



There was no other choice for Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan and coach Jamie Siddons than encountering what Virender Sehwag had just told about their team during the pre-match briefing yesterday.

The young skipper hit back on the harsh comments but in a modest way and to some extent he was diplomatic also while Siddons was wearing interesting smile on his face while replying on the issue as the Australian had the opportunity to live with a number one team for long. There was no shortage of confidence while Shakib and Siddons encountered an array of questions regarding Sehwag's comments, but they were very much aware of the fact that they had to prove their worth on the field, and not in a war of words.

"It's totally up to him [Sehwag]. It's his comments. It's of no use to say something before the match. Only after the match it would be possible for us to show what we are capable of," was the prudent answer of the 22-year-old Bangladesh skipper when asked about the observation of Sehwag about his team.

"I've not read the comments, so, it should not be worth talking about. Everybody goes through phases of development. Every team has good years and bad years. No real comments."

"We are not an extraordinary side. But we have proved to enough people in recent past that we are an improving side. I think we are hoping to show it in the Test match and the series. We'll take it day by day. As I said hopefully we'll prove Sehwag wrong," was the answer of Siddons.

But Shakib was quick to come up with a salvo. "They [India] have been ranked number one recently. I think South Africa and Australia are much better team than them. It's true that they [India] are playing very good cricket. They have a very good batting line-up. But still they are human beings. They can always make mistakes. If they make mistake and we can capitalise on that, we will be a very good team in the match," he said.

And to Shakib no team is invincible as he said: "They are not the batsmen that can never be got out or bowlers who cannot be batted against. I have taken five wickets against South Africa, New Zealand and Sri Lanka. You never know tomorrow I can take seven wickets or maybe no wicket at all. This is cricket

where you can't say hundred per cent before the finish of the match."

The 22-year-old skipper also expressed his high hopes by saying that they can beat any team if the players come up with their best but he was looking forward to playing good cricket session by session in the series against number one opponents.

"I think we are a good team also who can win against any side. I am not sure about the Test match, but definitely in one-day cricket. We are improving. We won the last two-match series against the West Indies. So I think we have a very good chance in this Test match. Hopefully, our boys will come up with their best in the series."

Replying to a question about Sehwag's comments that it's almost impossible for his bowlers to take 20 Indian wickets, Shakib said: "If we bowl our target will be to take ten wickets. If we bat the target will be to bat through the day losing four or five wickets. We will be thinking day by day. We are not thinking about winning or losing. It's a five-day game and the game can shift any moment. We'll think about day by day... session by session."

Coach Siddons also showed his confidence in his boys and proudly remem-

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BISHWAJIT ROY from Chittagong

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Indian little master Sachin Tendulkar bowls during net session at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong yesterday, ahead of the first Test that starts today.

Rain halts SA progress

Cricket

AFP, Johannesburg

AB de Villiers and Mark Boucher shared an attacking century partnership on the third day of the fourth and final Test against England at the Wanderers Stadium on Saturday before rain again interrupted South Africa's push for a series-leveling win.

South Africa were 382 for six, a first innings lead of 202, when a thunderstorm hit the ground 50 minutes after lunch.

De Villiers (58) and Boucher (79 not out) put on 120 for the sixth wicket, scoring at four runs an over, after three wickets fell early in the day.

De Villiers rode his luck, twice successfully seeking television reviews after being given out by umpire Tony Hill when he was facing off-spinner Graeme Swann, and then seemingly benefitting from a mistake by umpire Steve Davis when he appeared to edge a catch to wicketkeeper Matt Prior off Ryan Sidebottom.

By then, England had used up both their permitted reviews and they could not seek a further opinion from television umpire Daryl Harper.

While De Villiers was not entirely convincing, Boucher

was in excellent form, stroking his runs off 95 balls with seven fours.

Only two runs had been added when overnight batsmen Hashim Amla and Jacques Kallis were dismissed in successive overs, to be followed by JP Duminy.

Amla edged the tenth ball of the day from Stuart Broad for Prior to take a diving catch. Kallis followed in the next over when a ball from Ryan Sidebottom lifted more sharply than expected and an attempted pull looped to gully where James Anderson dived

to hold a good catch.

Duminy's troubles against Swann continued when he was beaten by the flight and sharp spin to edge the off-spinner's first ball of the day to slip.

It was the third time in the series he had been out to Swann in similar circumstances, twice caught at slip and once by the wicketkeeper.

At that stage South Africa were only 55 runs ahead and with a new ball due within seven overs England appeared to have clawed their way back into the match.

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South Africa's Mark Boucher is about to play a straight drive on the third day of the fourth Test against England at Wanderers Stadium in Johannesburg yesterday.

U-19s off to a winning start

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Under-19 got their World Cup campaign off to a winning start picking up a five-wicket victory with 112 deliveries remaining over Papua New Guinea in Palmerston North. The new-ball bowler Abul Hasan picked up four wickets, three of which dented PNG's top and middle order after they chose to bat, while the spinners kept run in check. PNG were bowled out for 191 in 46 overs. Set a D/L target of 189 in 46 overs, Bangladesh suffered a top-order wobble but the lower middle order polished off the chase. The main contributor was all-rounder bowler Shabbir Rahman, who hit an unbeaten 51 from 45 balls. His innings was sandwiched between key knocks from Mahmudul Hasan (38) and Nural Hasan (24 not out from 17 balls).

Bangladesh will play their second match of the campaign today when they take on West Indies at the same venue. Bangladesh will be looking to win their second match on the trot to confirm their Super League berth as they have a tough assignment against Pakistan on the 20th of January.

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Zoran calls for replacements

SPORTS REPORTER

Goalkeeper Biplob Bhattacharya and midfielder Pranotosh Kumar have been asked to join the national U-23 football camp for the South Asian Games to be held in Bangladesh from January 29 to February 9.

"Zoran [Djordjevic] has requested us to send six players to replace five injured players, who already left the camp, but of the six players, four are available and we have asked them to join the camp immediately," said team manager Hasanuzzaman Bablu after the meeting of the

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Wushu vows 2 gold

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh Wushu Association (BWUA) is hoping to spring surprise in their first-ever appearance in the 11th South Asian Games by giving the nation two gold medals on home soil.

Wushu, an event that belongs to martial arts like karate, judo, taekwondo, was included in the 10th edition of the regional extravaganza in Colombo with India and Sri Lanka dominating the medals table with three golds each.

But a young brigade of players, who are making their debut in the regional meet, are confident of reducing their supremacy.

"The way the players have been practising since January last year has made us confident that we will be able to give the nation two gold medals," said BWUA joint secretary AKM Shahidul Alam while declaring the squad at the Bangladesh Olympic Association Bhaban yesterday.

The participants from eight nations will fight for 10 golds -- four for Taolu and six for San Shou -- and Bangladesh is expecting gold medals, one in Taolu (demonstration) and other in San Shou (body contact).

"The events of Taolu is measured by scores and the scores of Mejhab Uddin and Abu Bakar have reached a standard level while in San Shou, the performance of Bashona Khandakar in 2007 is inspiring us to dream of gold medal," said treasurer Amir Hossain.

Unlike wushu, the Bangladesh Wrestling Federation (BWF) and the Bangladesh Basketball Federation (BBF) have set realistic targets of winning silver medals though the latter had never won a medal in the Games.

"We can promise you to keep the silver and bronze medals we have been winning since our participation in the second edition in 1985 in Dhaka," said wrestling coach Haji Ashraf Ali.

"We are expecting a silver from Billal Hossain in below 96kg category though

he has a good chance to win gold this time," said Ali.

Bangladesh, who never won a gold medal, bagged eight silver medals in 1987, 1989, 1993 and 1995 though the performance in the last three editions were not satisfactory. Last time, they won five bronze out of six events in Sri Lanka.

Besides, Bangladesh could never finish among the top three in the event of basketball, but the BBF officials are confident to break the jinx to bring at least a bronze medal on home soil.

"We are confident that we will at least win the bronze medal this time, but our target is to fight for the silver medal as India are far ahead of us," said BBF general secretary AK Sarkar.

Bangladesh have been drawn in Group B along with Nepal and Maldives and this fact is actually inspiring them to qualify for the semifinals. But in the last four, they will have to face rivals from Group A which included India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Afghanistan.

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Rajshahi, Dhaka win

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Rajshahi posted a mammoth victory over Sylhet by an innings and 139 runs on the third day of the 4-day match of the National league at the Khan Shaheb Osman Ali Stadium in Fatullah yesterday. Dhaka too wrapped up their match against Khulna winning by 8 wickets at the Rajshahi Divisional stadium. The other match between Chittagong and Barisal being played at the Khulna Divisional Stadium is poised for an exiting last-day finish as Barisal will need a further 177 runs to win with five second-innings wickets in hand.

Rajshahi spinner Saqlain Sajib was the wrecker-in-chief as he took six wickets in the second innings to skittle Sylhet for 244 runs in an innings and 139-run defeat on Sylhet. Saqlain got seven wickets in the first innings too, as his match tally stood at 13. The only batsman to stand out for Sylhet was Rajin Saleh

with a captain's knock of 112 runs that came off 174 balls. Rajin hit 18 boundaries and a six in his knock. Sylhet began the day on 86 for 6 in their first innings after Rajshahi had declared their first innings after 529 for seven on the second day. Sylhet quickly lost their four first innings wickets to the spin of Nayeem and Saqlain. Then Sylhet skipper Rajin Saleh staged his fight amid wickets falling all around to Saqlain. Saqlain was adjudged man-of-the-match.

Dhaka were in with a shout as they needed 232 runs to win with two days remaining. And their batsmen stood tall as they made an easy work of the Khulna bowlers picking up those runs in 58.5 overs losing only two wickets. The two openers Uttam Sarker (53) and Rony Talukdar (64) got half centuries before getting dismissed. Then Shamsur Rahman and marshal Ayub too got half centuries and remained unbeaten to guide Dhaka to an eight-wicket victory. Dhaka pacer Talha Jubair was adjudged for his eleven wickets in the match.

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DAY'S EVENT

Bangladesh v India
First Test, Day One
Venue: Chittagong Divisional Stadium
National Cricket League
(Four-Day Match, Day-4)
Rajshahi v Sylhet
Venue: Fatullah Cricket Stadium
Chittagong v Barisal
Venue: Khulna Divisional Stadium
Dhaka v Khulna
Venue: Rajshahi Divisional Stadium

What to WATCH

BTV & Neo Cricket
Bangladesh v India
First Test, Day One
Live from 9:30am
STAR Cricket
Sri Lanka v Zimbabwe
U-19 Cricket World Cup
Live from 3:30am
ESPN
Australia v Pakistan
Third Test, Day Four
Live from 5:30am
English Premiership
Aston Villa v West Ham
Live from 7:25pm
Bolton v Arsenal
Live from 9:55pm
TEN Sports
South Africa v England
Fourth Test, Day Four
Live from 2:30pm