

Shakib confident as ever

BISHWAJIT ROY and MOHAMMAD ISAM

ICC Cricket World Cup 2011
Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan strode in a bit later in the line of the fourteen captains, causing a mild flutter for a few who were waiting for the youngster. It happens once every four years that all captains of the World Cup participating nations take the stage for a media conference and a photo-call.

The Winter Garden at Hotel Sheraton yesterday was jampacked with mediapersons from across the globe (including a correspondent from Chinese news agency Xinhua) to meet the foremost important cricketers. But the chaotic atmosphere with the photographers and cameramen jostling for an inch of space and the enormity of the occasion did little to put Shakib off, confident as ever, never giving the air of a youngster in awe of the bigger names.

The staging of the opening ceremony gave Bangladesh this opportunity, one of the co-hosts, to host this short but unique press conference. It was also an opportunity to not only see how the younger captains react in front of the more senior ones and though Shakib was second from last to enter, the youngest captain to lead a team in this edition certainly held his own,

sitting next to the defending champions' captain Ricky Ponting.

On behalf of the captains, Ponting said he was delighted to be playing in the tournament in the sub-continent. "This is the pinnacle of cricket and it is amazing to be playing in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and India. It will be the best spectacle possible," said the three-time world champion and the defender of the trophy.

It will be a different time for Ponting, formerly the man who made heads turn on his own but his team has of course gone a few rungs down the ladder. But when asked about his team's chances in the tournament and given their falling stocks in world cricket, Ponting was still his typical confident self. "We are ready, done everything possible and we had a good few weeks in one-day cricket. But we respect all our opponents including Bangladesh," said the man who made 140 in the 2003 World Cup.

India skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni welcomed the world to the World Cup in the region, calling everyone to not only enjoy the cricket but also take a look around. "It will be an interesting tournament. We welcome the rest of the world to this World Cup and we would want you to enjoy the cricket as well as the historical monu-

ments," said Dhoni, leading perhaps the strongest team on paper.

Shakib, when asked if Bangladesh are ready for the India game, was also his typically self, fending off the question with some style. "We are actually preparing for the whole tournament and not just the India game. We have had very good preparations and we are confident and everybody is fit," he said.

The last time the World Cup was held in this region, Sri Lanka took the title. It would a huge question on Kumar Sangakkara's mind whether the Lankans can repeat that feat, done in 1996 under the astute leadership of Arjuna Ranatunga. The Sri Lanka captain added that it would be a great opportunity for his team to get to the finals. "The format of the tournament is such that if we can get to the quarterfinals, we are just two games away from the final," he said.

England skipper Andrew Strauss, South Africa captain Graeme Smith and Ireland's William Porterfield also spoke while Daniel Vettori (New Zealand), Darren Sammy (West Indies), Jimmy Kamande (Kenya), Ashish Bagai (Canada), Peter Borren (Netherlands), Elton Chigumbura (Zimbabwe) and Shahid Afridi (Pakistan) were also present on the auspicious occasion.



PHOTO: STAR

Captains of all the fourteen participating teams pose with the cricket World Cup during a photocall at the Sheraton Hotel yesterday.

ICC endorses Zim change

AFP, New Delhi

International cricket chiefs have approved Tinashe Panyangara as a replacement player for the injured Edward Rainsford in the Zimbabwe World Cup squad.

Rainsford is the eighth player to be replaced after compatriots Tino Tino Mawoyo and Sean Ervine, Australia's Nathan Hauritz and Michael Hussey, Praveen Kumar of India, England's Eoin Morgan and Sohail Tanveer of Pakistan.

Rainsford has injured his right ankle ligaments. Once replaced, a player cannot return to the squad, the International Cricket Council said.

The luckiest rickshaw-pullers

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country's 40-year history.

"I never dreamt of taking part in such a programme and I am so lucky, as thousands of people are trying to find a way to enter the stadium," said rickshaw-puller Siddik, who later carried English captain Andrew Strauss.

"You can't always manage with money but we have been given the chance because we are originally rickshaw-pullers," said Miraz, who later carried the New Zealand captain, Daniel Vettori.

When Ranfa was asked whether he knows who was going to be his passenger, he could not answer but others told him that it was to be Shakib, as most of them can sometimes watch day-night cricket matches on television but they could not make time when it is a day affair.

All of the rickshaw-pullers toiled hard over the last week as they attended the venue early morning and left afternoon with taking part in the trial once or twice each day. They even still don't know how

much they would be paid and despite that they were happy to be part of the ICC World Cup opening ceremony.

The rickshaw procession will remain a highlight of the night when the dust settles over the coming weeks. What is more quintessentially Bangladeshi than a rickshaw? There might have been fears that the opening ceremony, though it was being held in Bangladesh, would be an Indian affair given our neighbour's huge drawing power. It was the captains' rickshaw ride that underpinned a night that celebrated all things Bangladeshi. Segments were devoted to the two other co-hosts, but it was rightly a Bangladeshi affair. West Indies captain Darren Sammy bobbing his head to the music as he was carried in a rickshaw will probably be etched on the nation's collective mind for some time. Most importantly, it gave a very marginalized segment of Bangladeshi -- the rickshaw-pullers -- much to smile about, and that is as big an achievement as any of yesterday's celebrations.

Enchantment

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According to Fahed, the opening ceremony was close to events like the opening ceremony of Beijing Olympics or the Guangzhou Asian Games.

All, however, was not positive. Mismanagement reared its ugly head once again as the public had to go through a lot of hardship while entering the venue. Shantanayanan Ghosh, the treasurer of Open University, felt that the ordeal when entering the venue was the only minus point of the whole night. "The Opening Ceremony was good, but the police stationed at the entry points behaved badly and took everything we were carrying like water, food, etc. We suffered because of that as the food inside was exorbitantly priced."

"I bought tickets for the International Enclosure worth Tk.10,000, but when I eventually made it inside the arena, I was told that all the seats were full and I had to

watch the event from the gallery, the tickets of which are priced at Tk.1000," said banker Shareq Hossain, who had tried to enter the ground at 5pm, but was delayed because the gates were closed as a security measure for the Prime Minister's arrival.

Leg-spinner Piyush Chawla, off-spinner Harbhajan Singh and part-time spinner Yuvraj Singh each took two wickets, while off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin bagged one.

"It's a difficult task for any side when they have to chase six or seven runs an over. This is the way we should play all the time," said Harbhajan Singh, who took 2-17.

"When you set that total, teams have to chase and it gives you the chance to get wickets as their batsmen look to do something."

"We have won our two warm-up games, but we are not taking anything for

Ton-up MS leads India

AFP, Chennai

Mahendra Singh Dhoni smashed a blazing century to set up India's

crushing 117-run victory over New Zealand in a World Cup warm-up match on Wednesday.

The Indian skipper cracked three sixes and four boundaries in a 26-ball knock.

Dhoni's best came when he smashed paceman Jacob Oram for five successive fours, while Raina also punished the same bowler as he hit three sixes in an over.

Oram conceded 70 runs in his nine overs.

Dhoni said India were able to achieve "a total that was above par".

Speaking about his own game, he said: "In the past few games I have been in a hurry, but my game is different. I take my time and then like to stay until the end for the slogs overs. You have got to remind yourself of your strengths."

New Zealand stand-in skipper Ross Taylor said

Dhoni had taken the game away from his side, adding:

"Spinners are going to be a big part of the World Cup, and we have got to improve against them."

The stage for the closing-

overs onslaught was set by

Gautam Gambhir (89) and

Virat Kohli (59), who put on

106 for the third wicket after

India lost openers Virender

Sehwag and Sachin

Tendulkar for 42 runs.

Record-breaking batsman

Tendulkar, who recently

missed the last three one-day

internationals in South

Africa due to a hamstring

injury and was rested against

Australia, contributed just

17.

His eagerly awaited return

lasted 23 balls before he was deceived by a slower one from paceman Tim Southee and bowled.

India suffered another blow when hard-hitting Sehwag (23) was bowled by an Oram delivery that kept low, but Gambhir and Kohli steadied the innings with their sensible knocks.

Gambhir hit 11 fours in his 85-ball stay while Kohli hit seven boundaries in a 68-ball innings.

India open their World Cup campaign against Bangladesh in Dhaka on Saturday, while New Zealand take on Kenya in their first match the following day in Chennai.

SCORES IN BRIEF

INDIA: 360 for 5 (Sehwag 23, Tendulkar 17, Gambhir 89, Kohli 59, Dhoni 108 not out, Raina 50, Southee 2-67, Oram 2-70)

NEW ZEALAND: 243 (Guptill 38, McCullum 58, Ryder 32, McCullum 29 not out; Nehra 2-55, Yuvraj 2-33, Harbhajan 2-17, Chawla 2-39)

Result: India won by 117 runs.

Akhtar, Akmal dope tested

AFP, Dhaka

Pakistan's mercurial fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar was among three teammates who were taken for random dope testing ahead of the World Cup, a official confirmed on Thursday.

Akhtar, 35, wicket-keeper Kamran Akmal, 29, and seamer Umar Gul, 26, were tested after a practice session on Wednesday by the International Cricket Council's drug inspectors, team manager Intikhab Alam told AFP.

Broad saves England

AFP, Dhaka

Stuart Broad grabbed a five-wicket haul as England doused late resistance from big-hitting Rizwan Cheema to carve out a narrow 16-run victory over Canada in a World Cup warm-up game on Wednesday.

Rizwan threatened to take the game away with his explosive 70-ball 93 before Broad struck to remove the batsman and restrict Canada to 227 off 46.1 overs in reply to England's 243 all out at the Fatullah Stadium.

The paceman, making a surprise comeback after a stomach injury, finished with 5-37 to add to the efforts of Matt Prior (78) and Jonathan Trott (57) with the bat after England won the toss and elected to bat.

England's Kevin Pietersen, a surprise promotion to the opener's slot, insisted the side were not unduly worried after being given a scare by rank outsiders Canada.

"We just need to reassess what we are going to do in the middle overs in conditions like this, where we are going

to get our wickets, what fields we are going to set," he told Sky Sports News.

"But at the end of the day one bloke from Canada played absolutely beautifully, everything hit the middle of the bat. And that can happen on any particular day."

"Hats off to him, but we still won the game."

England seamer Ajmal Shahzad (2-44) rocked Canada when he dismissed the dangerous John Davison for one. Davison had smashed 111 off 67 balls, then a World Cup record, in a losing effort against West Indies in 2003.

Broad, key to England's chances at the World Cup, then sent back Nitish Kumar and captain Ashish Bagai off successive overs before ending a valiant 44-run knock by Khurram Chohan lower down the order.

Chohan showed his prowess with the ball as well, sharing six wickets with Harvir Baidwan to dent England's progress.

Chohan, a Pakistani import in the Canadian side, removed Andrew Strauss (one) and Pietersen before accounting for Ian Bell (eight) to return figures of 3-34 off nine overs.

Pietersen, a surprise promotion to the opener's slot, inside edged on to his leg-stump after making 24 off 28 balls, including three fours and a six.

Trott arrested the slide with his cautious 81-ball knock and found an able partner in Prior, who hit four fours and a six.

Prior added 54 with Trott, who mis-timed a sweep against off-spinner Davison, and then 51 with Broad after his Sussex team-mates Mike Yardy and Luke Wright both fell cheaply to Henry Osinde.

Prior was eventually bowled by Baidwan (3-50).

England play their second warm-up against Pakistan on Friday before starting their World Cup campaign against the Netherlands in Nagpur on February 22.

Canada take on Sri Lanka in Hambantota on February 20.

SCORES IN BRIEF

England: 243 (Pietersen 24, Trott 57, Prior 78, Broad 22; Osinde 2-42, Chohan 3-34, Baidwan 3-50)

Canada: 227 (Sarkari 22, Cheema 93, Chohan 44; Shahzad 2-44, Broad 5-37)

Result: England won by 16 runs.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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