

Brazil match to be Ballack's last

Ex-Germany captain Michael Ballack is set to win his 99th – and final – cap in August's international friendly against Brazil, according to reports here on Wednesday. Germany coach Joachim Loew is set to meet Ballack later this month to discuss the ex-Chelsea star's international future and his possible farewell match against Brazil in Stuttgart on August 10, the Bild daily reported. Ballack is not expected to be involved in Germany's Euro 2012 qualifier against Kazakhstan on March 26 or the friendly with Australia on March 29.



BANGLADESH V ENGLAND



I'M HONOURED: The combo picture is deceiving to say the least. It might suggest that Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan (L) is accepting a customary salute from his England counterpart Andrew Strauss. The reality is something different with both trying to release the pressure during training ahead of their crucial World Cup Group B match at the Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong yesterday.

PHOTOS: STAR/REUTERS

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Cometh the hour

BISHWAJIT ROY from Chittagong

In a war, a general can never look back. All his movements have to be precise and forward or else he could be victim of a fateful ending. Shakib Al Hasan's predicament, though not as life-threatening, is similar, when he will lead out Bangladesh in today's game against England, which is as crucial for the team as it is for himself. One backward step and he will have the opposition stomping all over him. But Shakib, at least for the time being, took the bold stance to keep his appointment with the press in the pre-match press conference yesterday at the Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium, and what he said should be proof of the 23-year-old's mindset at the moment. "It is quite easy for me to motivate my team as all the blame is on my shoulder, so there is no pressure on the team," said the young captain when asked about how he is motivating his team after being the center of all controversy following a humiliating defeat against West Indies in the previous game. Many of his close associates believe that he is a tough nut to crack, but even so a big challenge is now ahead for Shakib to prove his allies

right. It will thus not only be just another cricket match for the world's number one all-rounder when the Tigers take on England in the day-night affair. Bangladesh's chances of making the quarterfinals is now steep after they fell to a shocking nine-wicket defeat against the Caribbeans and off-field issues had dogged the side ever since. But a win will be the easiest way to put all the negativity aside. So the obvious question was; can an under pressure Bangladesh team recover from the hiccoughs today? Listening to Shakib though, there was no shortage of confidence about his team chances against England. "The boys are prepared as they have worked hard for the last few days. We are ready for the match. We believe that we still have a very good chance to make a quarterfinal berth," said a confident Shakib. "We have a feeling that we can do well. It is enough to make a player confident when he knows his abilities. Self-belief is the source of confidence. But we have to play good, positive and hard

cricket if we want to win the match," he added. Shakib has also banked on their previous record by saying that: "I think it is possible to make a comeback as we have a record of doing this before." The Bangladesh captain admitted that they had a poor batting performance so far in the tournament, which was the main reason behind their failure, but he promised that they would not make the same mistakes of their previous games. "We couldn't apply ourselves and I think we played too many early shots. I am hopeful that we will not make this kind of small mistakes against England. I had nothing particular to say about the West Indies game as I think that kind of situation happens once or twice in a lifetime. So we are not unduly worried about it. Instead we are thinking about how we can avoid the mistakes we did and how we can implement our plans well," explained Shakib. Was there any special planning to improve batting in today's game? Shakib however said that they would stick to their routine plan. "We won't be changing the routine in the batting as we know that we have played well with that routine. Things can go wrong sometimes but I think we should be following our routine," observed the Bangladesh skipper.

BANGLADESH-ENGLAND ENCOUNTERS		
Matches	Bangladesh won	England won
14	1	13
First meeting: Gymkhana Club Ground, Nairobi (October 5, 2000)		
Most sixes: Andrew Flintoff (12)		

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Enough of tight games!

MOHAMMAD ISAM from Chittagong

England captain Andrew Strauss has had enough of tight encounters in this World Cup and is aiming to nail down a place in the quarterfinals in today's Group B game against Bangladesh at the Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong. It has been nothing short of a topsy-turvy tournament for England although they are in second position in the group with five points from four games. After a slight hiccup against the Netherlands, England gave India a run for their money, tying a seesaw battle in Bangalore. After their shock loss to Ireland, England then beat South Africa in a low-scoring cliff-hanger in Chennai last week. "We've been very inconsistent in the tournament so far. We had two good games against South Africa and India and two less good games against Ireland and Netherlands," said Strauss in the pre-match press conference yesterday. "Firstly, we want to qualify for the quarterfinal, meaning we want to win the game, and secondly, we want to get some consistency into our cricket. We have to win this

game and the West Indies game to do that." "It has been great to be involved in these thrilling games. Personally I would have liked it to be easier, have a bit of hair on my head!" "But we have shown a lot of character in couple of those games. We want these last two to be less close, to be honest," admitted Strauss. England are up against the Tigers, a team that has defeated them once (and for the first time ever) last summer in Bristol, who have been down in the trenches after their morale-shattering loss to West Indies last week. But they will be respected by England, a feeling that Strauss made very clear ahead of the game. "The Bangladeshi spinners are as good as any spinners in the world. We'd be very careful and respectful as to how we approach them. The crowd is going to be behind Bangladesh. It is going to be a hostile atmosphere for us. But if you want to win the World Cup, you can't have everything on your own terms," said Strauss, adding that England are eyeing Tamim Iqbal's wicket keenly. "He's a very dangerous player, takes the game to the opposition. I think we know a bit more about him as a player now. We have to make sure we get our plans right straight away from ball one. Otherwise he'll get off and running," he observed.

Apart from the roller-coaster results and the prospect of another potential banana skin England have also suffered two major exits, with Kevin Pietersen (hernia) and Stuart Broad (side strain) ruled out for the rest of the tournament, though the left-handed opener was happy with the replacements. "It's [injuries] not ideal by any means. We've had to deal with it over the winter beforehand. We are very fortunate we have two ready-made replacements. Eoin Morgan's finger has recovered in time, thankfully, and Chris Tremlett

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TODAY'S MATCHES

Match	Time	Venue
West Indies v Ireland	10:00am	Mohali
Bangladesh v England	2:30pm	Chittagong





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Bangladesh v England

Bangladesh is under tremendous pressure to win remaining matches to reach quarterfinal. They have to focus on remaining matches. I feel our best chance is against England. On Chittagong pitch, winning the toss Saquib must opt for batting. This English attack is not menacing. Even Netherlands played them very confidently. South Africans choked against Broad and Anderson. Broad is already unavailable. Pietersen is also not there. Although their replacement Tremlett and Ian Morgan are good players yet Bangladeshis have nothing to get squeezed. Bangladesh played all of them in the recent past both at home and abroad. However our batsmen must play Anderson and Swann very carefully. Scoring 280+ runs against this English attack must not be a problem if we have definite plan how to get it.

Md. Kamrul Hasan

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