

# Star SPORT

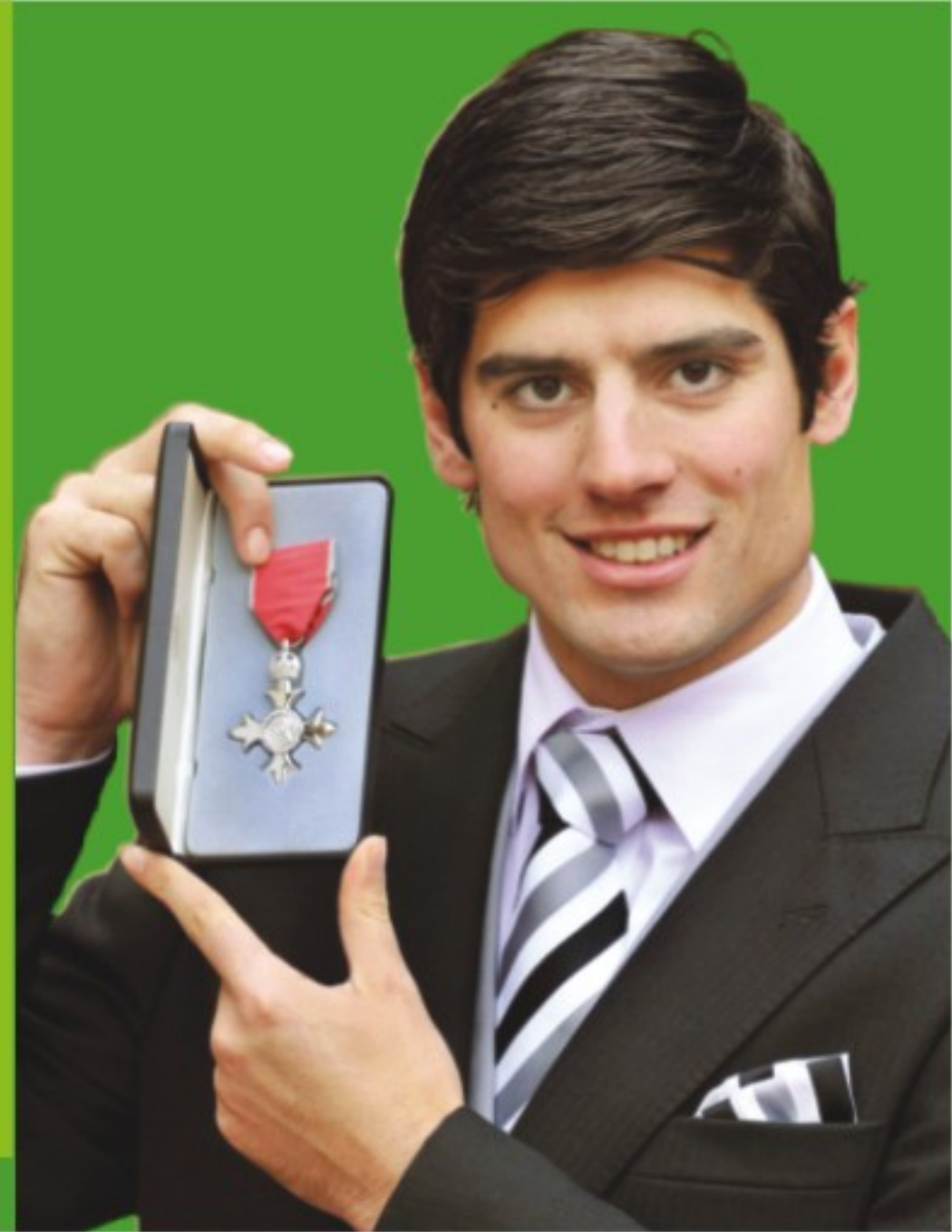
DHAKA THURSDAY DECEMBER 8, 2011, E-MAIL: sports@thedailystar.net

## MBE conferred on Cook

England batsman Alastair Cook said he felt "very humble" after receiving his Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) medal from Britain's Queen Elizabeth II at Buckingham Palace here on Tuesday.

The left-handed opener's prolific form in Australia during the 2010-11 Ashes series helped England to a 3-1 series win -- their first Test campaign triumph down under in 24 years.

Cook, 26, scored a mammoth 766 runs in the series to play a major part in that series win, which helped propel England



## Ashraful back, again

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammad Ashraful has made his umpteenth return to the national fold for the Test series against Pakistan starting at the Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium this Friday.

The national selectors picked a 15-man squad for the two-match series with several changes including Ashraful, who was not considered for the Tests against West Indies last month. Vice-captain Mahmudullah Riyad predictably returns but the selectors sprung a bit of a surprise by calling up Nazimuddin, the Chittagong captain, while Robiul Islam was also picked in place of Shafiul Islam who was rested, according to the selection panel. Apart from the Bogra paceman, Imrul Kayes and Rokibul Hasan were also struck out from the last Test squad.

But the return of Ashraful has again set tongues wagging. Since two poor outings in the ODIs against West Indies, the enigmatic former national captain was shunned by the selectors but within a month, he is back. In the interim, Ashraful has scored a century and three half-centuries including 58 in the current Dhaka Metropolis game against Khulna in the

National Cricket League.

Chief selector Akram Khan said he had "no choice" but to select Ashraful.

"My plan was to rest him for quite some time but the others haven't made much runs. He has scored a century and a couple of fifties and has shown that he is willing to fight in the middle," said the former national captain.

"We had no choice but there's little doubt he is one of the best batsmen in the country still and I hope he gets over his inconsistency," he added.

It was also domestic runs that led to Nazimuddin's selection, the Chittagong batsman being one of three batsmen to score more than 500 runs in the first-class competition.

Robiul's exclusion from the West Indies Tests was down to the Tigers' game plan of playing two pacemen. He had an excellent Test against Zimbabwe in trying conditions and took eleven wickets for Bangladesh A in the West Indies recently. This time, he could

share the new ball with Rubel Hossain as Akram & Co are not convinced by Shahadat Hossain's fitness, leading them to pick a 15-man squad rather than the 14 they picked against West Indies.

"Shahadat's fitness is still not 100 percent so we will have to wait for him," said Akram.

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**NEED TO PRACTISE HARDER:** Bangladesh skipper Mushfiqur Rahim stretches during practice at the Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong yesterday.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS

## Afghanistan, India through

SPORTS REPORTER

The tournament's dark horses Afghanistan and favourites India secured their semifinal spots in the SAFF Championship, beating their respective rivals at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in New Delhi yesterday.

Afghanistan thrashed nine-man Bhutan 8-1 to take pole position in Group A, thanks to a hattrick from Belal Arezou while Ata Yamir Ali, Haroon Fakhruddin, Djelaludin Sharityar and Yousef Mashriqi scored one goal apiece for the war-torn nation. The hattrick took Arezou's tally in the competition to five goals from three matches. Chencho

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## Bangladesh hit new low

*Players blame Ilievski for the debacle*

ANISUR RAHMAN from Delhi



Bangladesh made an early exit from the SAFF Championship after conceding a 3-1 defeat against Maldives in what was a make or break Group B fixture at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in New Delhi on Tuesday.

The loss completed Bangladesh's worst ever performance in

the regional showpiece event where they have failed to win a single game. They drew their opening game against Pakistan goalless before losing their next match 1-0 to Nepal.

Nepal's victory against Bangladesh was their first in 18 years while Maldives, once considered a favourite punching bag, notched up their first win against the so-called favourites in 12 years.

But those two painful defeats and a disappointing draw that threw Bangladesh out of the competition's first round

for the third time could hardly be described as shocking. It is more than that and to be honest it exposed the massive decline of Bangladesh football.

While India are still the team to beat in the eight-nation meet Bangladesh can be best described as a spent force with Maldives and new entrant Afghanistan coming on in leaps and bounds.

For the sake of record, Maldives' Ahmed Tahariq struck twice inside the first 20 minutes while Ali Ashfaq put the final nail in Bangladesh's coffin. Shahedul Alam Shahed scored the only goal for Bangladesh in the competition.

The team took an early flight back home yesterday. But prior to their departure from Delhi the disgruntled players were quick to blame their Macedonian gaffer for the gaffe.

"I have played under a lot of coaches like (George) Kotan, (Edson Silva) Dido, (Zoran) Djordjevic, who all designed their plans after settling the playing eleven because it was

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The team took an early flight back home yesterday. But prior to their departure from Delhi the disgruntled players were quick to blame their Macedonian gaffer for the gaffe.

## Precious chance wasted

SPORTS REPORTER



Mushfiqur Rahim has said that the Tigers are "mentally demoralised" as they lurched to a 3-0 ODI series defeat to Pakistan in Chittagong on Tuesday.

The home side collapsed from 69 for one to being bowled out for 119 in 38 overs after the bowlers gave them a golden opportunity to beat the visitors after bowling them out for just 177 runs in 46.1 overs.

"We were mentally demoralised. When you see batsmen score runs like Nasir [Hossain] and Shakib [Al Hasan] is doing for us, they play differently. You can see it in their side as well, batsmen like Misbah [Ul Haq] and [Umar] Akmal. But when you are not in runs, your shot selection goes wrong, which is what is happening to us," said the Bangladesh captain after the game.

It was the best chance for the Tigers to break their 22-game duck against Pakistan that spans twelve years and despite Tamim

Iqbal falling in the first ball of the innings. Shahriar Nafees and Mahmudullah Riyad added 61 cautious runs, but it all went downhill when there was an inexplicable 15-minute break due to the floodlights malfunctioning in the 20th over. Both captains were of the opinion that it was the blackout that led to the collapse, the Tigers losing the last nine wickets in just 18 overs.

An uncomfortable truth remains that nine out of the ten batsmen were stuck in the batting crease (only Alok Kapali holed out to deep mid-wicket).

"Obviously, we were then in a good shape. We were making runs in the last 1-2 overs [before the break] as in the making. So a break always can make a difference but obviously the batsmen need to settle down after every break. You have to adapt to the situation, but unfortunately we cannot do this.

"It's not impossible playing well against them. Nasir did it throughout the series so we can take inspiration from him. Even the

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**Bangladesh Ansar and VDP players celebrate with the winners' trophy of the KFC Women's Super League after defeating Sathkhira 2-0 in the final at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.**

PHOTO: STAR

## Darkness derails Tigers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Chittagong



As bad as the day was for the Tigers on the field, it was quite similar for the organisers off it in Chittagong on Tuesday.

A 15-minute delay disrupted the Bangladesh innings early in the evening due to the floodlights malfunctioning at the Zohur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium. Later, the umpires' car was stoned on its way to the hotel near the Akbar Shah locality, though no one was hurt.

Shahinul Islam Khan, chief engineer (distribution) of Power Development Bangladesh, informed that an unexpected cable flashing happened in the city's Khulsi area which was interlinked with the stadium.

"The alternative source was ready at Fauzdarhat area and our engineers, within four minutes, gave connection with the

stadium from Fauzdarhat," he said. "As floodlights take a few minutes to be fully functional, it took 8-9 minutes to fully light up the whole ground."

After the game, the back window on the left-side of the vehicle carrying umpires Enamul Haque and Johan Cloete was damaged.

"An incident has been reported," said BCB media manager Rabeed Imam.

"An object was hurled at the vehicle carrying the match officials that had the board's security escort. It damaged part of the window, but nobody was hurt. Everyone reached the hotel safely. The BCB condemns the incident and are taking the matter seriously. The investigation is being conducted in consultation with local police. We are awaiting a report from them," he added.



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