

SPORT



TIGERS DOWN UNDER

'A unique personality'

BISHWAJIT ROY

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza's journey thus far and his subsequent inclusion in the squad, as captain nonetheless, was probably the biggest surprise going into the 2015 ICC World Cup. The Narail Express will lead the Tigers in the mega event in Australia-New Zealand; something that nobody could have imagined two years ago, when questions were being raised about his career. The 31-year old pacer's story of overcoming one injury after another during his 14-year international career has only added to his legacy. The brave hearted cricketer has overcome all obstacles in his path to make his dream come true.

A fit-Mashrafe is always the first choice for performing heated jobs and nothing is better than having him available to lead the team in a tournament of such magnitude.

"I think the biggest advantage for the team is that it has got a captain like Mashrafe. From my experience as a captain I can tell you the first and foremost quality for a captain is whether or not he is respected by his teammates and there is no question about that aspect when it comes to Mashrafe, who earned respect on his own merits," said former national captain Habibul Bashar.

"Fortunately I have had the opportunity to watch him closely from the very beginning of his career and I must say he is a whole-hearted cricketer, both on and off the field. He not only has a good cricketing brain, but also has a completely unique personality which garners both respect and love. So, the right man is going to lead the team.

"I don't know what to say about his come-backs. He will be exemplified in world cricket. Generally a batsman's career is finished after two knee injuries, whereas he is still playing international cricket after six knee injuries... simply amazing. His sacrificing mentality from food habits to cricketing discipline is incomparable," continued Bashar.

Mashrafe was aware of the amount of belief in him, but he wants to see the World Cup as just another international series rather than shouldering any extra pressure.

"It's like a dream as I am going to lead the team in the World Cup but after what hap-

pened in my career, now I want to look forward and repay the faith which was placed in me. Naturally the flavour of a World Cup is altogether different from any other series or tournament but we have to treat it like any other tournament," said the Bangladesh captain.

"I think we have a very balanced side as everything has been covered with the best available options. Everybody knows their duty but the focus will definitely be on the younger players and if they can do their best, then our job will be easier," opined the experienced campaigner.

Mashrafe said that it's difficult but not

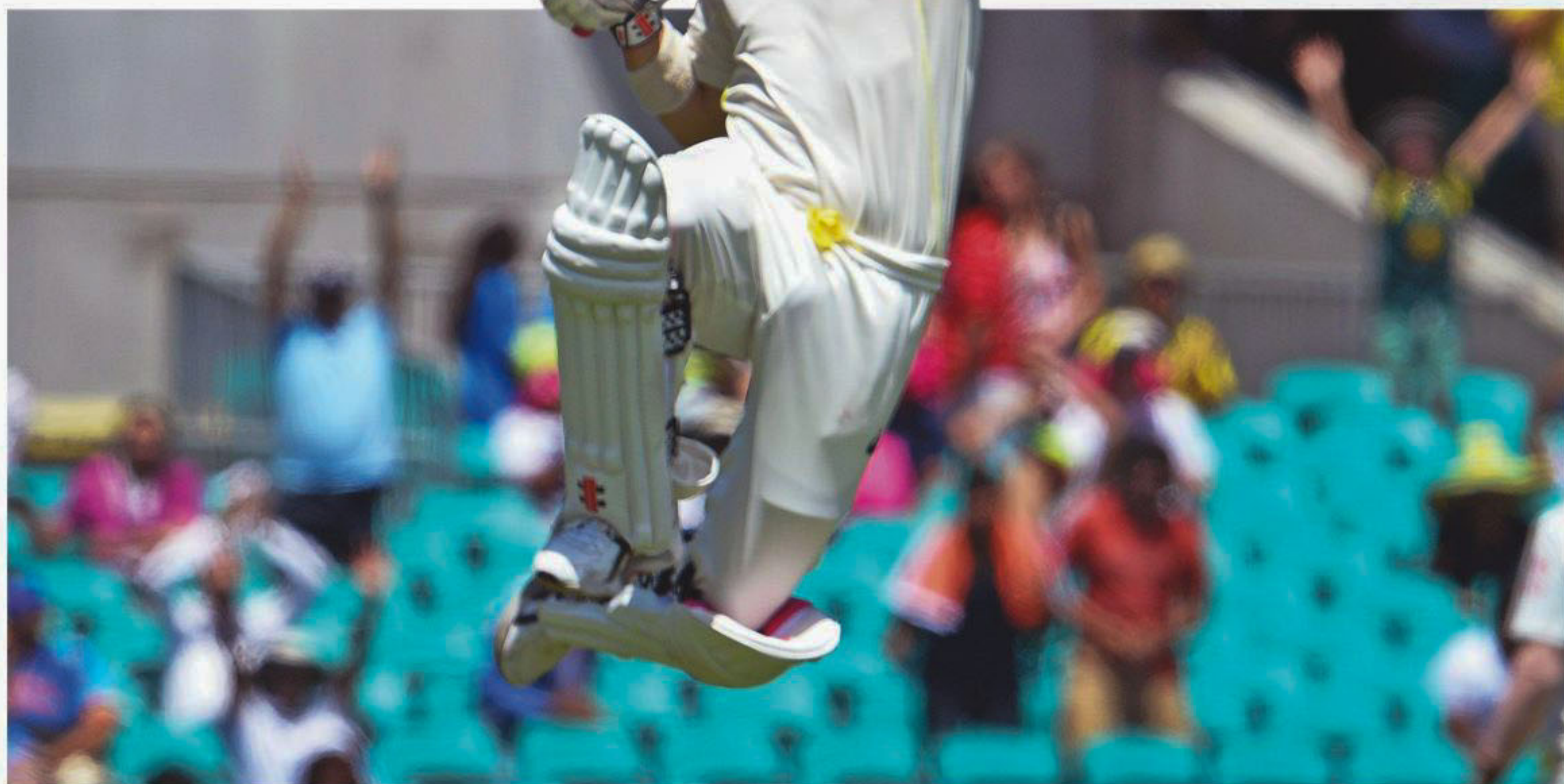


MASHRAFE BIN MORTAZA

impossible for his side to qualify for the second round.

"Our first target is to enter the second round, but it's a big challenge because we have teams in our groups who will play in their own conditions. But I don't think it's an impossible task for us; we need to play to our strengths and we can achieve favorable results," hoped Bangladesh's captain.

Before all that, the Tigers skipper hoped that his boys could capitalise on all the opportunities when they start their camp at home and then work on acclimatising with the conditions in Brisbane.



Australia opener David Warner jumps into the air in celebration after scoring his century on the first day of the fourth Test against India at the Sydney Cricket Ground yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Rockstar Shakib ready to rumble

STAR DESK



Ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan expects the Melbourne Renegades, currently at the bottom of the Big Bash League table after losing three of their four games, to make a comeback in the upcoming rounds.

Shakib is expected to feature in the team's match against the Hobart Hurricanes today.

"I hope I can contribute to the team. It does not matter how. Whether I score one run or take one wicket or save one run on the field. As long as I am contributing and the team's doing well, I will be happy," Shakib said in an interview published on the Renegades' Youtube page.

"I am feeling great and am looking forward to playing the game. Yes there is a bit of a jet lag but that's okay. I had an opportunity to play for the [Adelaide] Strikers... that was a good experience for me. Hopefully I will put that experience to use and do well for the Renegades," he added.

Shakib hopes to make a good start in his first match and carry on the momentum.

"If you start well that will be really crucial and then you need to continue that performance throughout the game... you need to be on your feet all the time, it is a very short game," he further explained.

The decision to sign Shakib, according to a Renegades official, saw a huge influx of Bangladeshi fans on their web page.

The left-hander was later referred to as a rockstar and was asked as to how it felt to get so much support.

"It feels great. They have been supporting me no matter which team I play for. I hope I can put in the performance that they want," replied a smiling Shakib.

Warner puts Oz on top

AFP, Sydney



David Warner kissed the ground in Phillip Hughes's memory to lead an Australian run spree with an emotional century on the opening day of the final Test against India on Tuesday.

The dynamic opener posted his third ton of the series and 12th in Tests as he honoured the memory of his fallen friend Hughes, who was fatally struck by a bouncer at the same Sydney Cricket Ground in November.

Upon reaching the symbolic score of 63 that Hughes had made when he was hit, Warner kissed the ground and then looked skywards before clapping in tribute.

Warner scored 101 and shared in an opening stand of 200 on a benign SCG pitch with veteran Chris Rogers, who again fell short of a ton in his fifth consecutive half-century of the series.

Skipper Steve Smith and Shane Watson maintained Australia's grip with an unbroken 144-run stand after winning the toss to put the home side at a formidable 348 for two at the close.

Smith, who glided to his half-century off 67 balls for his fifth innings beyond 50 in the series, was unbeaten on 82 with Watson on 61.

Watson was dropped by Ravichandran Ashwin at slip off the second-last ball of the day.

It is seven consecutive Tests where the in-form Smith has scored a fifty or a hundred. India have already lost the Border-

Gavaskar Trophy with Australia holding an unassailable 2-0 lead following wins in Adelaide and Brisbane.

The tourists have won only one of their last 22 Tests overseas and have been successful in only one of their 10 Tests at the Sydney Cricket Ground, that sole victory coming 37 years ago.

Warner batted for 180 minutes with 16 fours, pulling Mohammed Shami to the boundary to bring up his ton off 108 balls with 16 fours.

He was out soon after for 101 off 114 balls, caught at slip off a leading edge from spinner Ashwin.

Rogers, who gave chances on 19 and 90, followed Warner to the pavilion six balls later when he was bowled for 95 by Shami.

The Sydney Test was being played against the poignant backdrop of the tragic death of Hughes.

Warner posted his first Test century at the SCG and he, along with Smith, Watson, Brad Haddin and Nathan Lyon, were all on the field when Hughes was felled by the short-pitched ball.

A plaque honouring the batsman has been installed outside the home dressing room at the SCG and served as a reminder for the Australian players of their former team-mate.

SCORES IN BRIEF

AUSTRALIA: First innings 348 for 2 (Rogers 95, Warner 101, Watson 61 not out, Smith 82 not out; Shami 1-58, Ashwin 1-88)

INDIA: Vijay, Rahul, Sharma, Kohli (capt), Rahane, Raina, Saha, Ashwin, Shami, Yadav, Bhuvneshwar.

Writ against Rubel rejected

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday rejected a writ petition that sought its directive to remove pacer Rubel Hossain from Bangladesh's World Cup squad.

The HC bench of Justice Quazi Reza-Ul Hoque and Justice Abu Taher Md Saifur Rahman passed the rejection order, since the petitioner's lawyer was not present in court to place arguments on the petition.

Petitioner's lawyer Eunos Ali Akond told The Daily Star that he could not be present in the court, since he was busy with other cases.

He also said he will plea to the HC to revive the petition today.

Cinema actress Happy, who had earlier filed a rape case against the pacer under the Prevention of Women and Child Repression Act, filed the writ petition with the HC on Monday, also seeking its order on the government to confiscate Rubel's passport until the case is settled.

Rubel, who is on an anticipatory bail, has been included in the Bangladesh World Cup squad announced by the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) on Sunday.

The Tigers are scheduled to leave for Brisbane on January 24.

BFF in schedule conundrum

SPORTS REPORTER



For quite sometime the apex body of country's football, the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF), has been giving an increasingly irritating impression of a failed executor when it comes to sticking to a planned schedule.

The commencement date of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup, an invitational international tournament, has already become a jigsaw puzzle for many and yesterday the Professional Football League Committee (PFLC) extended the so called transfer window for the second time, putting the 2014-15 domestic calendar in serious jeopardy.

The PFLC led by BFF senior vice-president Abdus Salam Murshedy extended the players' transfer window for three weeks till January 31, reportedly in an effort to accommodate the six clubs who demanded more time to make their teams.

The transfer window was initially scheduled to end on December 11 so that the 2014-15 season could have started from December 17 with the Federation Cup. The Bangabandhu Gold Cup was next in line (From January 16-27) after the completion of the season's curtain-raiser.

But the frequent extension of the players' transfer, as well as the possible deferment of Bangabandhu Gold Cup, not only delayed the start of the season, but also opened the prospect of a

curtailed domestic calendar, which includes the Federation Cup, the Bangladesh Premier League, the Independence Cup and the Super Cup.

And with a series of international engagements for both the clubs and national sides in line this year, it would be an uphill task for the BFF to organise all four annual domestic events, let alone stick to any planned schedule.

According to the available roster, the AFC Cup play-off is in February, the AFC U-23 Championship Qualifiers in March, Indo-Bangla Bangladesh Games in March-April followed by the World Cup and Asian Cup Qualifiers (date yet to be decided) and the SAFF Championship in December.

India pick three spinners for WC

AFP, Mumbai



India's selectors on Tuesday chose three frontline spinners to help Mahendra Singh Dhoni's men defend the World Cup title in Australia and New Zealand from next month.

Off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin was joined by left-armers Ravindra Jadeja and young Akshar Patel in a 15-man squad announced in Mumbai for the showpiece event from February 14 to March 29.

Jadeja was selected despite being treated for a shoulder injury that forced him out of the ongoing Test series in Australia. Patel, 20, has claimed 14 wickets in nine one-day internationals so far.

The squad includes just four players -- Dhoni, Virat Kohli, Suresh Raina and Ashwin -- who were part of the winning team in 2011.

SQUAD: Mahendra Singh Dhoni (capt), Shikhar Dhawan, Rohit Sharma, Ajinkya Rahane, Virat Kohli, Suresh Raina, Ambati Rayudu, Ravichandran Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Akshar Patel, Ishant Sharma, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Mohammed Shami, Umesh Yadav, Stuart Binny.

SA clinch series

AFP, Cape Town



Dean Elgar guided South Africa to a series-clinching victory by eight wickets on the fifth day of the third and final Test against the West Indies at Newlands on Tuesday.

South Africa won the series by two matches to nil, with one match finishing in a rain-affected draw.

The left-handed Elgar made 60 not out as South Africa reached a victory target of 124 shortly before lunch.

It was tough going for South Africa at the start of the day after they resumed on nine for one.

Fast bowler Jerome Taylor and left-arm spinner Suleiman Benn did not concede a run until Elgar pulled Taylor for four after 26 minutes and off the 45th ball of the day.

SCORES IN BRIEF

WEST INDIES: First innings 329

SOUTH AFRICA: First innings 421

WEST INDIES: Second innings 215

SOUTH AFRICA: Second innings 124 for 2 (Elgar 60 not out, Du Plessis 14, Amla 38 not out; Benn 2-24)

Result: South Africa won by eight wickets and clinched the three-match series 2-0.

Player-of-the-match: AB de Villiers.

Player-of-the-series: Hashim Amla.

Proteas arrive on June 30

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) yesterday announced the itinerary for South Africa's tour of Bangladesh. The visitors will be scheduled to play two T20Is, three ODIs and two Tests in July in Chittagong and Dhaka.

They will arrive on June 30 and play a warm-up T20 match at Fatullah.

That will be followed with two T20Is and two ODIs in Dhaka. The players will then travel to Chittagong to play the last ODI and the first Test before returning to Dhaka for the final Test.

Tours barely take place in the country during June-July due to the seasonal monsoons. As a result, the board had initially tried to shift the dates of the series. However, a shift was not possible due to South Africa's packed schedule.

After the World Cup this year, Bangladesh are expected to play three ODIs, two Tests and a T20I against Pakistan in April. India is then expected to arrive in June to play three ODIs and a Test.

| ITINERARY | VENUE |
|---------------------------|------------|
| June 30: Arrival | |
| July 3: Warm-up match T20 | Fatullah |
| July 5: 1st T20I | Mirpur |
| July 7: 2nd T20I | Mirpur |
| July 10: 1st ODI | Mirpur |
| July 12: 2nd ODI | Mirpur |
| July 15: 3rd ODI | Chittagong |
| July 21-25: 1st Test | Chittagong |

Record stand slams SL

AFP, Wellington



A world record sixth-wicket partnership of 365 by Kane Williamson and BJ Watling, who both posted career bests, slammed the door on Sri Lanka in the second Test in Wellington Tuesday.

Williamson's unbeaten 242, with Watling not out 142 rescued New Zealand from a deep hole and carried them to 524-5 declared in their second innings.

Sri Lanka were left facing a 390-run target on a ground where the record for a successful fourth innings chase is 277-3 set by Pakistan 11 years ago.

At stumps they were 45-1 with Kaushal Silva on 20 and Dhammika Prasad on one.

Dimuth Karunaratne was out for 17 four overs before the close to be the only dismissal of the day.

With wickets hard to come by on a flat track, and with Sri Lanka holding middle-order strength led by Kumar Sangakkara, a draw seemed the likely outcome which would give New Zealand the two Test series 1-0.

Brought together as New Zealand's last recognised batsmen with the score at 159-5, a perilous 24-run lead, Williamson and Watling methodically ground the Sri Lankan bowlers into submission over the following eight hours.

The declaration came when they were 13-runs ahead of the previous sixth-wicket record of 352 set by Watling with Brendon McCullum in similar Test-saving circumstances against India a year ago.

Then, as now, New Zealand were fighting to claim the series after winning the first Test.

Sri Lanka were not without chances to break the partnership and regain control and they paid a heavy price for sloppy fielding.

Williamson offered four chances -- dropped by Rangana Herath on 29, dropped by Nuwan Pradeep on 60, dropped by Prasanna Jayawardene on 104 before Jayawardene missed a blatant stumping opportunity on 233.

SCORES IN BRIEF

NEW ZEALAND: First innings 221 (Williamson 69; Pradeep 4-63, Lakmal 3-71)

SRI LANKA: First innings 356 (Sangakkara 203, Chandimal 67; Neesham 3-42, Bracewell 3-93)

NEW ZEALAND: Second innings 524 fir 5 decl (Latham 35, Rutherford 40, Williamson 242 not out, Watling 142 not out; Pradeep 3-117)

SRI LANKA: Second innings 45 for 1 (Karunaratne 17, Silva 20 not out; Craig 1-0)