

# SPORT

## Team above all

BISHWAJIT ROY

In the last few days players have come up with their individual targets, expectations and desires, as well as the team goal in the coming ICC World Cup. Showing the spirit of a true leader Mashrafe Bin Mortaza is focused solely on the team's success. He did bracket Mushfiqur Rahim with the world's best batsmen or said Shakib Al Hasan got the ability to bowl well on any kind of wicket, but still he was not ready to worship any individual.

After the Tigers' last practice session in Bangladesh yesterday, the captain talked to the media at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur. During the marathon press conference the 'Narail Express' exuded confidence but was not ready to divulge his expectations as he believed that there was no limitation to success.

"I don't think it will help his career if someone finishes in top ten because there are always ups and downs in performances. See, someone may finish as the best player but what will it mean if he doesn't get nowhere near in next six months? But it will be historical and people will talk about it for a long time if we can take our team to a certain stage. To me the team's achievement is much more important than any individual achievement," said Mashrafe.

He also came up with a bold statement regarding the spinners' success in the tournament although there has been lot of talking surrounding the conditions down under, where pacers traditionally get the advantage. Bangladesh's bowling success is centred mainly on their slow bowlers and that's why many doubt their success in the unfamiliar conditions, but Mashrafe has

different opinions.

"It's my belief that spinners will play a vital role in the World Cup. From what I have seen in Tests, ODIs and Big Bash matches, the spinners' economy rate was better compared to the pacers'. The spinners will succeed only if there is no grass," opined the Bangladesh skipper.

From his long experience Mashrafe knows how important it is for his team to win the first game because the Tigers always need momentum, like they had during the 2007 World Cup in West Indies.

"We should prepare all our plans for the first match against Afghanistan," said Mashrafe, adding that they will get enough time to prepare a plan against another associate nation Scotland.

The Bangladesh skipper also found no reason to think too much about the conditions and he believes that his team has got the potential to beat any team in the world, if fortune smiles on them along with a good performance.

"Honestly speaking I am not in favour of targeting any team because it will put unnecessary pressure on the team during that particular match. We have beaten all the teams who are in our group and we also won matches in their home conditions. If we can play our best cricket then it is very much possible to beat any team. But as I said for that we need to make a good start," said a confident Mashrafe.

Everybody has faith in Mashrafe with regards to his leadership, but he has yet to be tested during tumultuous times. Mashrafe was also aware of that fact.

"It is always tough to lead a team like Bangladesh. It becomes tougher to lead if the team doesn't perform consistently. I led the team in the last five matches and won all of them, so that challenge is yet to be created," said Mashrafe.



Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (L) shares some light moments with coach Chandika Hathurusingha before going to a press conference at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

## It's a matter of fitness

SPORTS REPORTER



There is a saying; the mind thinks only when the body works. It may have sounded like an exaggeration when Bangladesh coach Chandika Hathurusingha said 'if he is not 100 per cent, he is not playing,' when asked about opener Tamim Iqbal.

But in reality a fit unit will be vital for the Tigers to succeed in the ICC World Cup in Australia and New Zealand. It is believed, considering the large grounds, that fielding and running between the wickets will play a crucial role for success in the mega event, and fitness will be the

key to that.

Chandika is fortunate enough that he has a group of young players who seem up to this challenge. Bangladesh completed their practice sessions at home and will fly for Brisbane tomorrow for a three-week conditioning camp, to adapt with the local conditions before the tournament begins. And the coach should ensure that his charges are fully fit, both physically and mentally, in order to handle the pressure of the event. A lack of match practice could also be an issue, but Bangladesh's coach was happy with the preparations that have been made.

"It's an advantage as well as a disadvantage. Ideally we should have played a bit of cricket in Australia and New Zealand, but that's not the case. I

think the advantage is that we are a bit fresher than the teams that have played long series recently," said Chandika, when his attention was drawn to lack of matches before the World Cup.

"I was really pleased with what we achieved during practice in match scenarios; it gives us a lot of confidence. The players are also feeling good about their game. I think the stint in Brisbane, as well as four matches over there, will give us a good indication about where we stand. It's all about getting used to the conditions and executing our plans. So, those two matches in Brisbane are important," he added.

The Sri Lankan however hardly had any doubts over his boys' abili-

ties to show the world their talent. "In regards to the ability of the guys, if you ask me, I am very happy with the talent that we have. And the improvement they have shown in the last six months in terms of skill development as well as their attitude and commitment is commendable," said a confident Chandika.

Tamim is yet to fully recover from his knee injury but he was very much optimistic about the opener making a comeback.

"Tamim is coming back from injury, but he is in our plans. We are hoping at this stage that he plays at least two games before we play our first match [against Afghanistan]. If we can get him stick to that plan I will be happy with that," he hoped.

## U-19s bounce back in Lanka

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Bangladesh under-19s bounced back strongly to stay alive in the five-match series against their Sri Lankan counterparts as they won the third one-day by 39 runs at the R Premadasa Stadium in Colombo yesterday.

After two consecutive defeats, the visitors put up an improved batting performance, scoring 251 runs for six. The innings was built around two half-centuries from Nazmul Hossain Shanto, who hit 69 off 75 balls with six boundaries, and Zakir Hasan, who made 62 off 46 balls with eight fours and a six.

Saif Hasan (34) and Mehedy Hasan (37) were the other notable contributors.

In reply, Sri Lanka under-19s were bundled out for 212 runs, with Charith Asalanka scoring team's highest 83 runs.

Mehedy claimed three wickets for 36 runs and Sanjit Saha took three for 30 runs for the tourists.

The fourth match will take place at the same venue tomorrow.

## Watto to miss England ODI

AFP, Hobart

All-rounder Shane Watson, who is struggling with a tight hamstring, joins a long list of absentees from Australia's top batting lineup to face England in the tri-series one-day international at Hobart on Friday.

Explosive opener David Warner is officially being rested for the one-day game, although he has also been told by Cricket Australia to "stop looking for trouble" after his latest sledge saw him demand that India's Rohit Sharma "speak English".

Michael Clarke is trying to regain fitness after hamstring surgery and stand-in skipper George Bailey has been suspended for a slow over rate against India in Melbourne on Sunday.

New skipper Steve Smith said Watson felt hamstring tightness while bowling in the nets in Hobart on Thursday.

## TIGERS' VENUES DOWN UNDER



NAJMUN NOOR

As Bangladesh graduates from a previous game with Afghanistan to one with Australia on February 21, this will be the first Goliath referred to earlier. But being a day-night game, and unless the summer goes totally berserk on game day, the impact of either side looking to bat or bowl early will be barely minimal. Chances of the dew factor being decisive may be remote for either side to fret and worry, or certainly not Bangladesh. In other words there are not glaring differences in results going either way for sides batting first or fielding first. At

the Gabba, over the past 25 years in 72 ODIs, teams batting first have lost 35 games and won 32, with 5 no results. More important than these stats is the hype surrounding the game. The Aussies will be looking to launch their bid for the coveted trophy with a clench of the fist in strong fashion, with the full home crowd backing them. And it would be a real time test of the resoluteness of Bangladesh facing the odds.

*The author is a marketing professional from the airline and telecommunications industry. He is a former Bangladesh national cricket player.*

## Eoin escapes a blackmail attempt

AFP, London

England one-day captain Eoin Morgan was recently the target of a blackmail attempt by an Australian man, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) revealed in a statement on Thursday.

The ECB said it had received an email from the man demanding a "five-figure sum" to prevent him revealing details of a relationship that Morgan had with a woman five years ago to the British and Australian press.

Following discussions with British police, the ECB approached the man, who "admitted and apologised for his actions, blaming jealousy". The ECB said the man is currently in a relationship with the woman in question.

"We will not allow anyone to disrupt our team's preparation or performance in the Tri Series and as we build up to the World Cup," said ECB managing director Paul Downton.

## Bangladesh KO-ed in shootout

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh's hope of playing the semifinal in the Hockey World League (Round-2) was dashed when they suffered a 0-2 shootout defeat to Oman in Singapore yesterday.

The third quarterfinal was decided in a shootout after a pulsating 3-3 deadlock during the regulation time where Bangladesh took the lead twice.

It was Bangladesh's third consecutive defeat at neutral venue against the Gulf nation after their 2-3 and 2-4 losses in the 2014 Asian Games and 2013 Asia Cup respectively.

Bangladesh, who will now face the hosts in a position deciding match today, took the lead against their familiar foes in the fourth minute with defender Farhad Ahmed Shitul converting a penalty corner.

However, the lead lasted eight minutes as Jandal Bait levelled the margin from a short corner. Jumman Anwar gave Oman a 28-minute lead, also from a penalty corner. In a match marked by forays and counter forays, Bangladesh reacted to level the margin two minutes later with a penalty-corner strike from forward Pushkor Khisa Mimo.

Bangladesh, despite having ten men on the field in the last quarter due to suspensions of Shitul, Hasan Jubair and Sarwar Hossain for different times, took the lead in the 49th minute through Jubair before Oman struck again three minute from time and forced the game into a tiebreaker.

In the shootout, Rasel Mahmud Jimmy, Jubair, Roman Hossain and Sarwar all have failed to score while Kalid Shaadi and Muhanna Hasan converted their shots for Oman.

## SC asks Srinivasan to give up IPL stake

AFP, New Delhi

India's Supreme Court ordered Thursday world cricket chief Narayanaswami Srinivasan to give up his stake in the Indian Premier League if he wanted to be re-elected head of the country's powerful board.

The court found Srinivasan guilty of a conflict of interest for having commercial dealings in the sport while head of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) by owning an Indian Premier League franchise.

"Srinivasan or any other administrator can't contest elections (to the BCCI) (while) they have those interests," the two-judge bench was quoted as saying by the Press Trust of India.

The court was ruling on the findings of a panel it appointed last year to investigate betting and other scandals in the lucrative Indian Premier League (IPL).

## No overflow this time

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To counter influx of spectators at venues during the Bangabandhu Gold Cup football tournament, the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has decided to strictly maintain the entrances.

The six-nation invitational tournament will commence on January 29 at Sylhet, which has witnessed overflowing crowd entering the playing area during an international friendly last year.

"That (match between Bangladesh U-23 and Nepal U-23) was a test case to see whether there were spectators for football. Besides, tickets were sold beyond the capacity of the gallery and lot of spectators rushed to the stadium but this time tickets will not be sold beyond the capacity and we will strictly maintain the entrances," said additional police commissioner Sheikh Mohammad Maruf Hasan, who is also the head of the security and traffic management sub-committee of the tournament, after its first meeting at the BFF House yesterday.

Hasan also ensured that foolproof security would be provided to the participating teams during their stay either in Dhaka or Sylhet.

Sylhet will host four games including one semifinal while the remaining matches of the 11-day tournament including the February 8 final will be held at Dhaka's Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Meanwhile, the BFF executive committee yesterday approved an estimated budget of Tk. 15 crore for the tournament, a considerable rise of the previous budget of Tk nine crore.

## Always a Calypso at heart



West Indies great Sir Vivian Richards said his heart will always beat for the Calypsos despite the fall of the former cricket empire.

"A team that was the trendsetter of cricket once upon a time was beginning to get left behind. When I look back at the time when ICC Cricket World Cup first came into being in 1975, I remember a time that was completely different from what it is today. There was no coloured clothing or white balls or black sightcreens. In fact, we wore cream-coloured tracks back then," wrote Richards in a column titled 'The rise and fall of an empire' and carried in ICC official website ICC Media Zone.

"I was just a rookie then and with so many great players, I only batted at number five or six. But I wanted to contribute to the team's cause and in the final, I helped run out Alan Turner, Greg Chappell and Ian Chappell. I cherish that to this day!" wrote Richards on the first World Cup in 1975.

West Indies also won the next World Cup in 1979. But Richards, a key component of the West Indies batting by that time, admitted that for a change he played the supporting actor's role to Collis King in the final against England.

"In the final against England, our top-order was in disarray. But then Collis King came in and played magnificently to take all pressure off me. It is not often when someone outdoes Vivian Richards but King came and did just that. There was no point playing like him, so I just supported him at the other end. When he got out for 86, I decided to take charge and teed-off from there. But King was the man responsible for my hundred [138 not out]," recalled Richards.

He also praised Indian captain Kapil Dev for winning the 1983 World Cup.

"We had the opportunity to win the tournament for a third time. But Kapil Dev, a cricketer whom I admire a lot, instilled a new belief in them [India] that certain dreams can be achieved.

"I was out hooking and no



SIR VIVIAN RICHARDS

other India fielder other than Kapil could have taken that catch. It showed the belief in him," wrote the magnificent batsman.

"I was the captain in the ICC Cricket World Cup 1987 and scored 181 runs against Sri Lanka. It was a great knock. But I take it as a personal disappointment that West Indies couldn't reach the semifinals. There is one other memory from that tournament.

"Against Pakistan, Saleem Jaffer was backing up a fair bit and Courtney Walsh asked if he could run-out [Mankad] him. I told him to warn Saleem but not to run-out

him. Because if he had done that, it would have been a stigma attached to West Indies and this is not what our cricket was about," Richards reflects on.

According to Richards West Indies were never been the same force after that World Cup. "Things changed after that for West Indies cricket and we started going downhill from there.

West Indies were not invincible anymore and the loss to Kenya in the ICC Cricket World Cup 1996 was the biggest proof," added the champion batsman.

He said that he was happy to see Sachin Tendulkar winning the World Cup in 2011.

"I believed that an individual who has given so much, not just to India cricket but also to world cricket, he deserved to have some silverware on his mantelpiece," he said.

"We were not considered contenders for quite a while now, but my heart will always beat for the West Indies, my thoughts and prayers are always with them," was how Richard signed off.