

## Siddikur's Maybank mission

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's premier golfer Siddikur Rahman will look to shake off the disappointment and injury concerns of the year gone by as he tees off at the Asian Tour season's curtain-raising tournament, the Maybank Malaysian Open today.

The 30-year-old golfer, who recently tied the nuptial knot, left the country with his wife last week to warm up for the 30m-dollar event to be held at the Kuala Lumpur Golf & Country Club.

Blighted by a nagging side strain, Siddikur participated in only 12 Asian Tour events last year and finished 36th in the Order of Merit. However, having won two BPGA tournaments at home in January, Siddikur is raring to start the new season on the right note.

The two-time Asian Tour will have former world number ones Lee Westwood and Graeme McDowell, and Asian Tour stars like Thongchai Jaidee, Anirban Lahiri and Kiradech Aphibarnrat to contend with.

## Tigers at the centre of Clarke's return

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Australia skipper Michael Clarke must have taken Bangladesh bowling coach Heath Streak's comments seriously. Streak, upon hearing that Clarke would face the Tigers in Bangladesh's second practice match, stated that the visitors would spread the field and let the injured skipper take as many 'cheeky singles' as he wanted.

As a result, when Clarke replaced his willow with a baseball bat during his net sessions and hammered the throw-downs with immense power at the Allan Border Ground yesterday, one could tell that the Australian was preparing himself for the challenge.

For Clarke, who is currently recovering from a hamstring injury, the match against Bangladesh will be a checkpoint for his fitness issues.

According to the player, batting with the baseball bat helped him middle the ball more frequently. According to the Australian media reports, Clarke's excitement level was evident and the drives were rocketing to the adjoining field. One of his lofted drives even hit Greg Chappell, whose attempt to get away from the ball went in vain.

For the Tigers, the match today will witness a change in atmosphere. Unlike the first practice match -- which they lost by five wickets -- the second has already generated wide-scale publicity due to the inclusion of the Australian skipper.

All rounder Shakib Al Hasan already went on air stating that he would not have any problem if Clarke scores against them in the practice match, as long as the



MICHAEL CLARKE

Australian does not do much damage in their group stage game at the Gabba.

The Tigers, who will be playing without opener Tamim Iqbal, are not expected to change their stance. They are likely to go with the same aim that they had in the first match: look to provide all their players with maximum exposure.

In the first match, which saw them field 13 players, they called



Bangladesh team enjoyed a day off in Brisbane yesterday. They will play their second and last unofficial warm-up game there against an Australia XI side that will feature Michael Clarke.

PHOTO: COURTESY

back Mominul Haque after the left-hander scored a half-century. The move was made to give an opportunity to the middle order. The bowlers were also given a maximum of seven overs each.

While the pacers were among the wickets, the spinners disappointed. Taijul Islam was taken apart for 56 in his seven overs,

while Arafat Sunny failed to pick up a wicket.

Al-Amin Hossain, who did not feature in the first warm-up is expected to play today.

Tigers, who took the day off yesterday, will want to improve on their batting. On a comparatively small Allan Border Ground, they will need to score a lot more than

231, their total in the first warm-up, to be competitive.

By the looks of how Bangladesh are treating the warm-ups, a win may not necessarily be their main aim; but there's no doubt that a victory against a side that includes Australia's captain can take their motivational levels to an entirely different level.



## EXPECTATIONS DOWN UNDER

## 'Win three matches'

SPORTS REPORTER

Faruque Ahmed, along with his two other colleagues, has done quite a reasonable job with the team this year. There has not, after all, been any controversy over the team selection for the ICC World Cup, unlike the last time he was in charge in 2007.

It is believed that best possible players have been picked to represent the country in the biggest cricketing event in the world. In this context Faruque was quite a happy man, but when it comes to expectations, the former national skipper showed a guarded approach. His main concern revolves around Bangladesh's batting. Going by the recent matches that took place down a total of 280 seems to be the benchmark for any competitive team. However, the question remains as to whether the Tigers got the ability to post such a score on a regular basis.

"You know on any given day anything can happen in one-day cricket, but in my opinion we can score around 250 runs on a regular basis. For the sub-continental teams it is not easy to cope with the conditions in Australia and New Zealand. Our players have grown up playing on slow and low pitches, so they cannot change overnight and are bound to struggle in the bouncy

surfaces. But we have some quality batsmen in the side and I am looking forward to watching them," said Faruque.

"I will be eagerly waiting to see how our fielding response is in the World Cup. Under the guidance of our fielding coach (Richard Halsall) the boys worked really hard for the past few months and I want to see the outcome of this hard work. I have full faith in our



FARUQUE AHMED

bowling department as they have got the ability for a calculative effort and if the bowling is ably supported by the fielding then the batting deficiency will be covered up and we can get some results," he added.

The chief selector said that he was not thinking about the second round or the quarter finals. All he wants is for the Tigers to win three matches.

"If we can win the matches against Afghanistan and Scotland as expected and then win a match against any big team I will be happy."

Like many others, Faruque was optimistic but he was not ready to go overboard with the expectations and harboured a very simple desire.

"I will be really happy if our team shows the energy on the field and appear as a beautiful unit throughout the tournament," hoped Faruque.

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Chasing 153 in the last 15 overs may be a common scenario in one-day cricket; in the T20s you will be expected to gobble those runs up. However, going after such a target on the last day of a four-day match, with six wickets in hand, is a proposition that not many captains will want to attach themselves to.

However, Khulna's Ziaur Rahman and Imrul Kayes, on the final day of the second round of the National Cricket League at the BKSP, had other ideas. Khulna needed 284 runs in the last 64 overs to overcome a spirited Barisal side on the final day and halfway through the chase Khulna had lost their top three and were reeling at a precarious 72 for 3 in 30.5 overs. Neither of the players at the crease,



ZIAUR ... 65

Imrul and Mithun Ali, at that point, were even thinking of a win. All they were hoping for was to play out the day and avoid a defeat.

"We were not even thinking of a win at that point in time since we had lost quick wickets. But after Tea, when Mithun got out, we decided to go for the target one last time and sent Zia up the order. He generally bats at seven," explained Khulna batsman Tushar Imran.

Zia came in and did what he is known best for, hammering the ball out of the park. He ended up smashing seven sixes in his 31-ball 65 and provided the impetus that Khulna needed. He was well supported by Imrul, who scored his second century of the match. His unbeaten 127 saw him hit four sixes, three of which came in the last three overs of the day.

"Initially I was just taking the singles. We needed around 160 from the last 90 balls. I let Zia get most of the



IMRUL ... 127 n o

## SCORES IN BRIEF

**DHAKA:** 525  
**DHAKA METRO:** 90 and 411 all out in 121.5 overs (Shamsur 92, Abu 68; Jubair 4-143, Shuvagata 3-97)  
**Result:** Dhaka won by an innings and 24 runs.  
**Player of the match:** Abdul Majid

**BARISAL:** 271 and 402  
**KHULNA:** 390 and 287 for 4 (Imrul 127 not out, Ziaur 65; Shohag 3-109)  
**Result:** Khulna won by six wickets.  
**Player of the match:** Imrul Kayes

**RANGPUR:** 367 and 301 for 8  
**SYLHET:** 261 and 326 for 6 (Nazmul 61, Rahatul 55; Bishwant 3-30)  
**Result:** Match drawn.  
**Player of the match:** Liton Kumar

**CHITTAGONG:** 209 and 298 all out in 107.3 overs (Jasimuddin 61; Muktar 5-58, Shafiq 4-56)  
**RAJSHAHI:** 411 and 100 for 1 (Myshukur 61, Junaid 33; Alauddin 1-21)  
**Result:** Rajshahi won by nine wickets.  
**Player of the match:** Muktar Ali.

strikes. It was an unbelievable match, especially because they put eight fielders on the boundary-line. We had to hit hard and clean.

"Towards the end, when we needed 36 off the last three overs, I hit three sixes and then the equation became easy," said Imrul.

In the day's other games, Rajshahi beat Chittagong at Mirpur at the BKSP, Dhaka beat Metro at Fatullah and Sylhet drew with Rangpur at the BKSP.

## Bhatti in for Junaid?

INTERNET

The chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board Shaharyar Khan said today that the PCB was still waiting for the tour selection committee to decide if it wanted to have Bilawal Bhatti in the World Cup squad.

Speculations have been strong that the tour selection committee will send back all-rounder Bilawal who went for 93 runs against New Zealand in the second one-day international which Pakistan lost by a big margin in Napier.

Bilawal was sent to New Zealand with the national team after pacer Junaid Khan pulled out due to a hamstring problem.

Junaid, who was named in the World Cup's 15-member squad, was ruled out of the tournament on Monday after failing a fitness test in Lahore, but Khan said the selectors will decide the next line of action.

"Bilawal was not in the World Cup squad so we will have to get clearance from the technical committee to include him in the WC squad or some other player."

Pakistan's preparations for the World Cup have so far been awful as they have already lost champion spinner Saeed Aijmal due to an illegal bowling action while doubts also remain over whether Muhammad Hafeez would be able to bowl in the mega event after he was also suspended from bowling in international cricket by the ICC in November.

## Armstrong in car crash

AGENCIES

Disgraced cycling champion Lance Armstrong crashed his car into two parked vehicles and his girlfriend took the blame after a night out, reports said.

The 43-year-old's girlfriend, Anna Hansen, 33, initially told police yesterday she was behind the wheel of Armstrong's car following the incident in December in Aspen, Colorado.

She later admitted to officers that Armstrong -- given a life-ban from cycling three years ago after admitting doping -- had been driving the car at the time, The Denver Post reported.

He faces charges for failing to report an accident and speeding, which are punishable by up to 90 days in jail and fines of up to \$300, it said.

## Viv's No. X?

Eight batsmen and two bowlers made the cut as Sir Vivian Richards' picked his World Cup top ten, on the ICC's official website. In an earlier column on the first of February the cricketing legend picked his top ten batsmen ever to play the game. Virat Kohli, Chris Gayle and AB de Villiers were retained in this list and, without any hesitation, Richards started off with AB de Villiers, saying: "The more I watch him, the more it feels like I am watching myself bat". The rest of the players who made it to the list were:

**Steve Smith**

*He is almost tireless, picks gaps with ease and has a wonderful hand-eye co-ordination*

**Glenn Maxwell**

*If we get him at his best, then other teams better watch out for him*

**Brendon McCullum**

*He is a dynamic batsman and as such I am also curious about what he can do while he is also leading the side*

**Kumar Sangakkara**

*The experienced Sangakkara has the capability to inspire his team to deliver a good showing at this event*

**Dale Steyn**

*He is just so consistent and aggressive, and his ability is second to none. In my opinion, he is the best fast bowler in the world*

**Mohammad Irfan**

*Because of his height, the bounce of hard Australia wickets will be very useful for him and he will trouble the batsmen with it*

**The missing number ten**

*Whether it was an oversight by the Media Zone, or Vivian Richards waiting on the fitness results of Michael Clarke, the tenth player remained unnamed. Perhaps Richards is pondering the need for an all-rounder, and if so, then Shakib Al Hasan certainly fits the bill to claim the last spot.*



## WORLD CUP COCKTAIL

Australian opening batsman David Warner Wednesday backed all-rounder Glenn Maxwell to star in the World Cup but wants him to show more patience in his innings.

Power-hitting batsman Maxwell scored 95 runs and took four wickets in last Sunday's One-Day International (ODI) tri-Series final victory against England.

"It was great to see him score runs, but we had nine overs to go and he played that kind of shot (to get out) when we already had nine off the over," Warner was quoted as saying by cricket.com.au.

## Rivalry will miss 'Tendulkar factor'

When holders India clash with Pakistan in their potentially high-octane campaign opener of the ICC Cricket World Cup on February 15 at the Adelaide Oval, the awe-inspiring Sachin Tendulkar would be conspicuously absent for the first time in a match between the two arch-rivals in the showpiece event.

The batting maestro, who has

retired from the game after a glorious 24-year-career, was a constant presence in each of the five contests between the sub-continental giants in cricket's mega event, picking up three man of the match awards too and stamping his authority on these nerve-wracking contests which had all ended in India's favour.

## Pietersen in for WC

Former England captain Kevin Pietersen has joined the BBC Test Match Special commentary team for the World Cup in Australia and New Zealand.

The four-time Ashes winner will be on air for the quarter-finals onwards.

"I really enjoyed having a go at some commentary during the Big Bash," said Pietersen. "It will be good to return to Australia for the climax of what should be an exciting tournament."

TMS will commentate on all games via Radio 5 live and 5 live sports extra.

The BBC's head of radio sport Richard Burgess added: "This is an ambitious year for cricket on BBC radio - with 5 live leading the way with

its biggest ever offer.

"I'd also like to welcome Kevin Pietersen to the fold for the Cricket World Cup and look forward to hearing him on TMS."

Pietersen's fellow pundits will include Geoffrey Boycott, Michael Vaughan, Graeme Swann, Vic Marks and England Women's World Cup winner Ebony Rainford-Brent.

## ICC's World Cup Poll

The ICC has made a shortlist of 112 players from which fans select eleven players in order to make their greatest World Cup XI in the ODI era. The poll features many of the greatest batsmen, bowlers, wicketkeepers and all-rounders for fans to choose from, including the starts of past and present. Anyone can cast their votes and make a team as they see fit, opting for their personal favourites or studying further and forming a formidable team. However, the only real drawback to the poll is that it features only one Bangladeshi player, ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan. - *Compiled*

## SIZE MATTERS

A forecast crackdown on bat sizes by the International Cricket Council (ICC) may be undertaken soon. ICC chief executive David Richardson said, "No one begrudges an AB de Villiers, who plays some superb shots. Some players are exceptionally talented and no one minds if they hit some great shots which go for six. But some batsmen are mishitting balls and it is just going for a six instead of being caught at the boundary, that is what some people believe has become unfair." While the MCC's Cricket Committee decided against making changes to the law last July, this time around there may be a different outcome.

- There are no laws concerning depth of the bat
- David Warner and Chris Gayle use bats with edges as much as 45mm
- The reduced boundaries and the use of new balls in each innings allows more advantages to batsmen

