

# SPORT

## ECB'S STATEMENT

England and Wales Cricket Board tonight confirmed that England's tour of Bangladesh will continue as planned.

A full assessment of facilities and operations in both Bangladesh and India was made this month by Reg Dickason, Director of Security Management for ECB - and a consultant for the PCA - ECB Director of Cricket Operations John Carr and Chief Executive of the Professional Cricketers' Association David Leatherdale.

England players - including Test captain Alastair Cook and One-Day captain Eoin Morgan - were tonight briefed on arrangements and the risk assessment by Reg Dickason, alongside Andrew Strauss, David Leatherdale, John Carr and ECB Chief Executive Tom Harrison.

Following the meeting, Andrew Strauss said:

"England's Tour of Bangladesh will continue as planned. "Safety and security of players and management are always paramount. We've received a thorough risk assessment, had excellent insight into the current situation and been fully briefed on security commitments. ECB and PCA have the utmost confidence in the advice and support we've been given.

"Tonight we discussed details with the players and management in an open meeting. They asked lots of questions, have time to ask more and will clearly want to take it all in - we understand that. Selection for the Tour will be made after the end of the summer internationals."

"We will, as always, continue to monitor the situation right up to and throughout the tour."

Arriving on 30 September, England are scheduled to play three warm-up matches, three One-Day internationals and two Test matches, before leaving Bangladesh on 2 November. They will then travel to India for a five-Test series starting on 9 November.

# 'A victory for cricket'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's cricket fans woke up to great news on Friday morning. The tour that they had been concerned about for the last month, had finally been confirmed.

The England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) gave its national team the green signal to tour Bangladesh, as per schedule, this October. However, they will continuously observe the security situation in the country until their arrival on September 30.

Members of the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) welcomed the news and described it as a victory for cricket.

Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal said that it was the best piece of news that he had heard in some time.

"Considering the current situation, I don't think there is any better news than this. As a cricketer, I want to thank the England cricket team with all my heart. I am 100 per cent sure that the whole nation, our government, BCB, and every fan will do whatever that is required in order to make this series successful," he told The Daily Star.

BCB director Akram Khan said that England's decision was a 'win for cricket'.

"Many might look at this as just another series. But keeping everything in mind and analysing the situation, this was a big challenge for us. This is actually a win for cricket. England has shown that the game won't stop just because of a few evil forces. They have

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-Tamim Iqbal

whole contingent of family members, supporters, reporters, etc.

"We will make sure that not just the players but the fans, the family members, the reporters -- if they let us know where they stay and they contact us, we will arrange security for them no matter where they are, be it in the stadium or next to the hotel, wherever. We believe that there won't be any problem with regards to this England tour," he told reporters yesterday afternoon.

"We will provide them with a three-tier security system. But of course, there will be a lot more covert security steps taken, secure steps that are not discussed. I was confident that they would agree to tour Bangladesh because of a number of reasons.

"One of them is that no board in the world provides the kind of security we will be providing them with. During the Under-19 World Cup our security team had handled more than a dozen teams. I am sure they will be able to handle one team without any problem," added the BCB president.

After the terror attack at the Holey Artisan Bakery on July 1, the tour was thrown into uncertainty and the routine security visit of the relevant areas by a three-man ECB security delegation last week, assumed special importance.

Following a meeting between the delegation, ECB officials and players on Thursday, it was decided that England would tour Bangladesh.

shown that to the rest of the world."

Meanwhile, BCB president Nazmul Hassan Papon said that the BCB would create a secure environment not just for the England team but the

## First hurdle the hardest U-16 women face Iran today

SPORTS REPORTER



Drawing inspiration from the success of the under-14 girls team in the AFC Girls' Regional Championship, the Bangladesh under-16 women's team will hope to fulfil their dream in the AFC U-16 Women's Championship Qualifiers, providing that they can overcome the toughest hurdle on the first day.

Bangladesh will take on the favourites to top the group, Iran, at the Bangabandhu National Stadium at 6:00pm after the Chinese Taipei vs Kyrgyzstan (11:00am) and United Arab Emirates vs Singapore (3:00pm) matches are held at the same venue on the opening day.

In the last edition of U-16 Women's Qualifiers held in Dhaka in 2014, Bangladesh -- comprising of mostly the U-14 girls -- finished third behind group champions Iran and India but ahead of Jordan and UAE.

Interestingly Bangladesh lost to Iran and India by an identical 2-1 margin despite initially taking the lead, while they stunned Jordan 1-0 before post-

ing a massive 6-0 win over UAE.

Two years later, the mighty Iran are again predicted to be a thorn in Bangladesh's side. The hosts will have to make sure not to give their superior opponents any space. The Bangladesh girls have gained a lot of strength over the past two years and with fresh blood injected into the side, they now boast better skills. Some of these girls have already proven their worth in the U-14 Regional Championship by lifting back to back titles.

The Bangladesh U-16 team is comprised of 12 players from the U-14 team that won the AFC Regional Championship and have 11 other players who have represented Bangladesh at international level in the past. Most importantly, much of this group of girls have been together for the past two years.

"Iran are a very strong team and they are one of the best teams in the tournament. But we are also ready. It will be a tough match but we will definitely play for victory," said Bangladesh coach Golam Rabbani Choton at the official press conference yesterday.

Meanwhile, Iran coach Shadi

Mahini praised Bangladesh for their performance in the last edition and labelled the home side as 'good, energetic and a cool team that are doing really well'.

"We can't tell who will win tomorrow [Saturday]. All of the participating teams came here to win and Iran are not unlike them. We like to win and we want to become champions," said a confident Mahini.

Like Iran and Bangladesh, Chinese Taipei also dream of qualifying for the eight-team final as they have come here with six-months of preparation alongside playing six practice matches in Japan.

"Our target is to qualify for the finals by winning this group and to achieve our target, we have taken a long preparation and played some good practice matches against teams in Japan," said Chinese Taipei Assistant coach Kao Tsai Hu.

However, the rest of teams -- Kyrgyzstan, United Arab Emirates and Singapore -- have no big dreams. Instead they have come here to learn from the international matches and they are also keen to show their improvement.



The Bangladesh Under-16 team will face what is expected to be their toughest challenge in AFC U-16 Women's Championship Qualifiers on the opening day when they face their Iranian counterparts at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today.

PHOTO: STAR

## Tigers become booters for a day

SPORTS REPORTER

The England cricket team's decision to tour Bangladesh provided much relief for a nation scarred by recent events and starved of cricket, but one area of the capital got an extra-special treat yesterday.

The raucous roars reaching the living rooms of Banani DOHS yesterday evening may have fooled the residents into thinking that Argentina were playing Brazil in the World Cup in a parallel universe that had somehow found a wormhole into this one, or that the Tigers had suddenly started playing an unscheduled cricket match against India and were on the verge of a famous win.

Reality was somewhere in

between.

The members of the Bangladesh cricket team, all but one or two of them, had come to the Banani DOHS field to partake in a local football tournament, and the cheers were for the goals they were scoring. Not that they were scoring a lot, at first at least.

The national players played two matches, losing the first game to DOHS United -- a team made up mostly of youngsters -- 2-1, the solitary Tiger goal having come off the boot of Soumya Sarkar. Playing against the 30-somethings of the Footy Hags however, the Tigers roared back with a 4-1 win. Anamul Haque scored a brace while Shakib Al Hasan and Nasir Hossain hit one each.

To the delight of the few hundred

who lined the boundary of the field of play, the match was an intense affair.

Shakib seemed to be running the show, reacting animatedly from the right wing every time his fellow Tigers squandered an opportunity to get even. On the left wing, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza was, as usual, giving it his all while Nasir was a livewire running to and fro. Sabbir Rahman, a major attraction for autograph and selfie seekers after the match, was mostly cleaning up in defence. Behind him Nurul Hasan traded his wicket-keeping gloves for goal-keeping ones.

At one point Mashrafe's searing shot missed the post, but smashed into a little boy wearing a Neymar jersey. "Hey, Neymar! You okay?" a concerned Mashrafe called out to

the boy as he was walking away, and upon receiving confirmation that the little tyro was indeed alright, the Narail express tousled his hair to generous applause.

There was one person seemingly immune to the intensity of his national teammates -- Tamim Iqbal. The hard-hitting opener was on the touchline, erupting into wild celebrations every time his charges scored and making the atmosphere more festive than it already was.

"As a manager I have left [Jose] Mourinho behind," he told The Daily Star later last evening. Whether he did in fact surpass the new Manchester United coach is anyone's guess; he did however cause a stoppage in play when he wandered onto the field and intercepted a ball during play.

## Saintfiet leaves for Belgium

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh national football team's head coach Tom Saintfiet flew for Belgium yesterday to attend to his pregnant wife, who is expected to give birth to the couple's first child today.

The 43-year-old coach is expected to accompany his wife and his new-born child for three days before joining the Bangladesh national team in Maldives for the warm-up match against the Islanders in Male on September 1.

"He [Saintfiet] will join the national team in Maldives from Belgium after the national team leave here for Male on August 30," said Bangladesh Football Federation general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag, adding that the coach had already finalized his 23-member squad for the warm-up game against Maldives.

Under Saintfiet's supervision, Bangladesh started their preparation for the Asian Cup Play-off Qualifiers against Bhutan from August 22. Bangladesh will host Bhutan on September 6 in Dhaka before travelling to Thimphu to play the away leg of their match on October 10.

## Faf confident of Centurion pitch

SA-NZ Second Test starts today

AFP, Centurion



After the embarrassment of an abandoned first Test, South African captain Faf du Plessis proclaimed Friday that conditions for the second and final Test against New Zealand at SuperSport Park, starting Saturday, were excellent.

He was less happy that the series will be decided in what effectively is a one-off match.

Less than 100 overs of play was possible in the first Test in Durban before a wet, soft, recently re-seeded outfield made further play impossible after rain on the second day.

But Centurion is completely different. A lush, green outfield, planted with winter grass in April, had hometown player Du Plessis excited.

"It's a fantastic nick, the outfield is looking amazing. It's the best I've ever seen it," he said.

New Zealand captain Kane Williamson was less effusive but said: "It looks a good outfield, there don't seem to be too many clouds about and there should be no problems."

With no rain expected, the match looks set to go the distance. The unknown is the pitch.

"It looks a touch on the soft side and a bit moist," said Du Plessis. "We're not too sure what to expect, I think it might be slow."

With South Africa a lowly seventh in the Test rankings, Du Plessis said the team wanted to play more Test matches in longer series.

"A two-match series is too short. With the current schedule, having five-match series is going to be hard in the future. I like three or four Test series. With two Tests you only just get going and unfortunately a once-off here is what we've been dealt."

Williamson was less concerned about the prospect of one match deciding the series.

"You don't have too many lotteries in Test cricket. Over five days, generally the team that plays more consistent cricket wins the game or at least gets ahead in the match. It is a shame that we aren't able to play two full Tests or even more but that is what it is, so our preparations are very much on adapting to this surface and hopefully putting out a strong performance."

"But it would be nice to play three or more Tests in a series. The more you play against the same opposition the more you learn about them."

Most of the Bangladesh cricket players took some time off yesterday to play in a local football tournament in Banani DOHS yesterday, much to the delight of their fans in the area who flocked to the field the moment they heard news of their heroes' presence.



PHOTO: SHAMS MOHD SHAHRIYAR