

# SPORT

## Wary Tigers reach London

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh cricket team reached London in the afternoon yesterday, where they will be based for their first Champions Trophy match against England on June 1 at The Oval and before that, their second Champions Trophy warm-up against India at the same venue on May 30.

Although practice matches are typically contests where wins and losses do not matter much, the manner in which Bangladesh lost their first pre-tournament warm-up against Pakistan in Birmingham on Saturday was a cause for concern and the team, a lot of whom were fasting, were a little downbeat upon their arrival at the Grange City Hotel in East London at around 2:15pm yesterday.

In Saturday's match Bangladesh had Pakistan on the ropes after getting them seven-down for 242 after 41.3 overs, chasing 342. It was then that a relative unknown by the name of Fahim Ashraf, who came in to bat at number nine, smote an unbeaten 30-ball 64 to deliver a scarcely believable two-wicket win with three balls remaining.

There was something else that was scarcely believable about the match, and that was the distance of one portion of the boundary from the pitch on which the game was played. The boundary behind square on one side of the wicket was approximately 40 yards away from the wicket, which is far

short of the usual minimum of 60 yards.

It was learnt that Bangladesh were unwilling to play the match because of the boundary issue, and that coach Chandika Hathurusingha had also gone to his Pakistan counterparts on the morning of the match. However, the Pakistan camp was desperate to get some match practice under their belt.

The match was played on a wicket at the edge of the strip of pitches at the historic stadium. The curator reportedly had no role to play in the decision as the ICC had instructed him to prepare the wicket for that particular practice match six months ago. It was also learnt that the issue was taken to the International Cricket Council.

The batsman who caused all the damage, however, did not seem too bothered by the boundary's proximity. "We initially tried to hit towards the smaller boundary, but they kept bowling an outside-off line to make us hit towards the longer boundary. So we adjusted our game and kept hitting the ball straight. We slowly started to believe that we could hit the ball no matter where it was pitched. We didn't worry about the longer boundary, we just played our shots," Fahim said after the match.

Bangladesh had not employed two of their main bowlers in Mustafizur Rahman and Rubel Hossain, and were reportedly confident of a win until three overs were left in the match. It was then too late to bring the two in. At the very least, regardless of short boundaries and rested players, the loss is a warning sign that the Tigers will do well to heed.



Bangladesh batsman Tamim Iqbal walks into the Grange City Hotel in London after their journey from Birmingham yesterday afternoon. The Tigers will next play a Champions Trophy warm-up game against India at The Oval on May 30.

PHOTO: AL-AMIN

## England missing the vibe

AL-AMIN from London

If you are in London and expect frantic activities centring around the ICC Champions Trophy -- the most important global cricketing event after the World Cup -- all around the mega city, you will certainly feel very disappointed.

As the travelling Bangladeshi journalists, quite large in number, moved along the green channel of Heathrow Airport on Saturday evening after embarking on a long flight from Dhaka, they curiously looked around for a few banners stuck on the wall, primarily promoting the Champions Trophy.

But apart from a vendor and a railway worker, attired in traditional English costumes welcoming the arriving guests, those neatly arranged walls hardly allowed any space for cricket or the showpiece event in particular. There was not even any indication of the Champions League final between Real Madrid and Juventus that will take place in Cardiff on June 3 in a hectic week of sporting activity across the United Kingdom in one of the busiest international airports.

There was another surprise in store for the travelling reporters. After enduring a three-hour hassle at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, where everybody was talking about security concerns in the wake of a terrorist attack in Manchester last week where 22 people were killed, the Heathrow experience was pleasantly smooth for the travelling reporters. It did not even take half an hour for them to cross immigration.

The atmosphere was so normal that no one even felt any security issues. But had it been the case in Bangladesh the imposing presence of those gun-toting security personnel from airport to every key point in Dhaka would have given you a scary feeling. When we reached the Grange City hotel, the temporary abode for all eight participating teams while they are in London, in the evening after a one-hour taxi ride skating through huge traffic, we did not find even a uniformed police guarding the entrance of the hotel, which is located very close to London Tower. It looked like any other hotel even with the Indian and the New Zealand team on board.

It was only on Sunday morning that a few uniformed police, brandishing automatic weap-

ons, took their position at the hotel entrance when the India team bus left the hotel to play their scheduled practice game against New Zealand at the Oval.

Although India have a strong fan following across the cricketing world, there were only a few Indian fans roaming around the hotel to have a glimpse of their stars.

Even though the hotel is very close to East London, where a large Bangladesh community lives, not even a single Bangladesh expat was around to greet the Tigers.

The whole scenario might give someone the feeling that the security issues were not as imposing as should have been the case, especially after the Manchester attack. But the beauty of England security is that it was subtle. More importantly, it is done in a way so that it doesn't disturb the mobility of the masses. Pedestrians were even walking along the footpath when the Bangladesh team members were disembarking from the bus. This is something we can't simply imagine in Bangladesh, where roads are blocked for hours for the smooth passage of a visiting team's bus.



The Bangladesh team were not happy about the boundaries at Edgbaston, where they played their first Champions Trophy warm-up against Pakistan on Saturday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

## A historic loss for Kerber

AFP, Paris



Angelique Kerber became the first top seed to lose in the opening round at Roland Garros on Sunday as tearful Petra Kvitova swept to victory in her first match since surviving a knife attack which almost ended her career.

German world number one Kerber dropped serve six times on her way to a 6-2, 6-2 defeat to Russia's Ekaterina Makarova. Before this year, the earliest exits suffered by a top seed in Paris came in the second round -- Justine Henin in 2004 and Serena Williams in 2014.

"At the end of the match, it was really tough as I knew she wouldn't give it to me -- I had to win it," said Makarova, a former semi-finalist at the Australian and US Opens.

It was the second successive first round exit at Roland Garros for Kerber, the reigning US Open champion -- last year, she fell to unseeded Kiki Bertens of the Netherlands.

It also continued a miserable spell for the 29-year-old on clay in 2017. She lost her opener in Stuttgart where she was the defending champion, suffered a thigh injury in the third round in Madrid and lost first time out in Rome. On Sunday, she fell a double break down to trail 5-1 to her Russian opponent who she was facing for the 12th time.

Makarova, now ranked 40 after reaching a career high of eight, was a double break ahead again for 3-0 in the second set. Four successive breaks of serve followed before Makarova saved seven break points in the crucial eighth game to cause the upset.

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Germany's Angelique Kerber became the first top seed to be knocked out in the first round of the French Open after she was stunned by Russia's Ekaterina Makarova in Paris yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Mohun Bagan arrive tonight

SPORTS REPORTER

Kolkata giants Mohun Bagan will arrive here tonight to play their final Group E match of the AFC Cup against Abahani. The encounter is set to be held on Wednesday at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Having suffered a 0-2 defeat to JSW Bengaluru FC in the Federation Cup final, Mohun Bagan, who finished runners-up in the I-League, will play their last match of the season against Abahani to seek some consolation as only the top team from the group will advance to the knockout stage of Asia's second-tier club tournament.

Mohun Bagan are in third position of the four-team group with six points from five matches while Maziya S&RC of Maldives and JSW Bengaluru occupy the top and the second position with 12 and nine points respectively.

Meanwhile, Abahani lie at the bottom with three points. However, Bangladesh Premier League champions Abahani are in good form in the domestic circuit as they have registered two successive wins to move into the semifinals of the Federation Cup. The Sky Blues will definitely try to make use of that form on the international stage and end their maiden AFC Cup campaign on a winning note.

## 'LET'S FOCUS ON THE CRICKET'

AFP, New Delhi

Former India captain Kapil Dev said he hoped the row over the ICC's revenue sharing, which almost led to an Indian boycott of the Champions Trophy, would not affect performances on the field.

"I hope all this talk doesn't impact the players. But today, media putting so much focus on everything it must be having some effect on them when they read and see the news," Kapil, the 1983 World Cup winning captain, said.

"As a sportsman I just want to be bothered about cricket on the field."

"Whatever happens otherwise, let the administrators take care of that," the legendary all-rounder said.

The BCCI are seeking a better deal before the ICC ratifies the new structure at its annual conference next month.

"See, we are just trying to get the board its rightful share," a senior board official told AFP on condition of anonymity. "We work for the best interest of the players and our wishes are with them to defend the title and play the brand of cricket that they have been playing."

### ACID TEST FOR SARFRAZ

Pakistan's wicketkeeper-batsman is credited with injecting new energy after winning three of his first four games, two against the West Indies and one against lowly Zimbabwe.

But former captain Ramiz Raja believes the team lacks the skill-set needed to regularly beat top sides in modern limited-overs cricket, which tilts heavily towards batting.

"They say a captain is as good as his team and this side lacks power-hitting skills," Raja told AFP.

"Also to win he needs to find wickets with the new ball. He has to be in control of his emotions -- he must have a flexible plan based on discipline to create a winning environment."

The animated Sarfraz, who was often spotted screaming instructions at his fielders during the West Indies series, warned that Pakistan cannot be counted out.

"It's true we are (ranked) number eight but we are capable of giving a tough time to our opponents," Sarfraz told AFP.

"We will overcome our weaknesses during our preparations in a camp in Birmingham and will be noticed for our fight."

Pakistan's biggest task will be matching the big-hitting of other teams.

## AB upset at tampering inference

AFP, Southampton

South Africa captain AB de Villiers insisted his side had done nothing wrong after they found themselves caught up in a fresh ball-tampering row on Saturday as they lost their one-day international series against England.

As if that was not bad enough for the tourists, de Villiers thought he might be accused of ball-tampering during England's innings.

After the 33rd over, it appeared he was trying to get the ball changed.

But de Villiers later revealed he was in fact insisting to umpires Chris Gaffaney and Rob Bailey that the Proteas were not responsible for illegally altering its condition.

On Saturday, de Villiers felt his side risked being accused once again, although he added the fact the umpires did not in the end change the ball was proof of the Proteas' innocence.

Asked at a post-match news conference if he felt he was being held responsible, de Villiers replied: "Yes, I did."

He added: "The umpires felt the condition of the ball changed, in a way making me feel we were responsible as a team."