

# SPORT

## 'We want to be as relaxed as possible'

**AL-AMIN** from Cardiff

As the Bangladesh cricket team headed off to Birmingham from Cardiff yesterday it felt like they were heading for mission impossible. They were boarding the team bus one after another at around 11:40am when one of the few ladies enjoying the weekend outside a bar opposite the team hotel, popped up in front of the team bus to have a selfie with the players. She was very excited to see off the players even though she had little acquaintance with the game and the Bangladesh cricketers.

It was more like a goodbye in the Wales fashion. But the most affectionate send-off from Cardiff, where Bangladesh created history by defeating New Zealand by five wickets and eventually made it to the semifinals of the Champions Trophy, was reserved for opener Tamim Iqbal and of course by a tiny Bangladeshi expat in this small city.

Tamim was waiting outside the lobby when a lady with her four-year-old daughter turned up and requested the player for a selfie. The batsman complied and the tiny tot offered him a box of chocolate. He first politely refused to accept it by saying that he did not like chocolates anymore but after looking at the cute little girl he took it.

Ever since Bangladesh's win against the Black Caps, followed by England's victory against Australia that sent the Tigers into a dream semifinal, Bangladesh fans and the players alike are still wondering if it is all real.

Understandably, the Tigers, who have

been on the road for quite a long time, have suddenly discovered themselves in a territory they were not mentally prepared when they came to England to play the Champions Trophy.

Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza admitted that they definitely did not consider that they would make it to the semifinals.

"This is something we did not think of when we came here. It came to our mind when we beat New Zealand. Yes, we are now into something which is very big. But we don't want to put ourselves in any sort of extra pressure. We want to go into the semifinal as relaxed as we can. We also do not want to put any extra effort in training," said the Bangladesh captain about the June 15 semifinal at Birmingham's famous Edgbaston ground.

He once again said that he was least interested in who they would be playing. He was also of the opinion that there is not much of a difference among the competing teams.

"I will still rate Australia as the best team. Their tournament may be over but they are a team that has got the best bowling attack in these conditions. They have also got a batting unit that is impossible for any side to stop from scoring runs," the Bangladesh captain observed.

When asked if he was luckier than his coach to have the honour of leading a team that loves to break one barrier after another, he said: "I think we are both lucky. This is a team that I think has the ability to be more like Australia. But in that case we will have to play more Tests because it really helps to be a complete cricketer who can perform at any level."



South Africa skipper AB de Villiers dives to reach the crease, but is run out by India keeper Mahendra Singh Dhoni during their Champions Trophy Group B match at The Oval in London yesterday. It proved to be the turning point as South Africa were bundled out for 191 and India romped home with eight wickets to spare.

PHOTO: AFP

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Bangladesh fast bowler Taskin Ahmed is all smiles as the team prepared to leave Cardiff yesterday. The Tigers reached Birmingham at four in the evening to prepare for their first ever Champions Trophy semifinal on June 15.

PHOTO: AL-AMIN

## Time for the young guns to fire

**SPORTS REPORTER** from Cardiff

When Bangladesh will go into the semifinal of the Champions Trophy at Edgbaston on June 15 they will desperately need the junior members of the team to come to the party if they are to take their dream to the next level.

Bangladesh's passage to the semifinal has so far been on the back of a collective contribution of the experienced players. Opener Tamim Iqbal hit a majestic century and followed it up with an incredible 95 in the first two games of the tournament. Mushfiqur Rahim hit a fantastic fifty against England. Shakib Al Hasan and Mahmudulah Riyad struck magnificent hundreds in an amazing 224-run fifth-wicket stand in that seminal victory against New Zealand.

But both the two young top-order batsmen -- Soumya Sarkar and Sabbir Rahman have so far lived up to their reputation. Soumya has scored 3, 3, 28 and 0 in his last four innings. The young left-handed opener has been struggling to cope with the seam bowling in these conditions. He could have been out on a number of occasions before being adjudged leg-before off Tim Southee in the last game, where Bangladesh lost their first four wickets for 33 runs.

Sabbir has also failed to prosper, first lower down the order and then at his usual number three position in the last game. His last four innings were almost a telephone number with 8, 8, 24 and 0. Although his 24 against England could be considered a good effort since he could bat only a few overs, he has also struggled against the new-ball like Soumya.

Among the bowlers Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and

Rubel Hossain bowled well. Rubel has so far been outstanding. But the biggest disappointment in the tournament has so far been young left-arm pace bowler Mustafizur Rahman. With his cutters not effective in these condition where the ball does not grip that much, he has failed to make any impact. In the three games he has taken only one wicket and conceded 129 runs in 23 overs. It was very expensive considering the lofty standards he set

**Tigers Inside** ANWAR ISPAT



Bangladesh batsman Soumya Sarkar is among those youngsters who have not yet fired in the Champions Trophy, and the Tigers will need them to come to the party if they are to make the tournament more special than it already is.

PHOTO: AFP FILE

when he arrived on the big stage.

However, skipper Mashrafe defended his young brigade and said that this was something that his young pace bowler should accept and adjust to.

"This trip is a learning curve for all the young members of the team. This conditions are new for them. I want them to enjoy and learn as much as possible so that when they return here in two years' time for the World Cup they are well equipped to deliver," said the inspirational Tigers captain.

He also said that he was against putting the young players into any undue pressure going into the semifinal, where a collective performance would be very important if Bangladesh are to win the game.

Young pace bowler Taskin Ahmed also talked to reporters before boarding the team bus.

"As young members of the team we are very excited. I'm more excited because when we came here I said that we will make it to the semifinals. And by the grace of the almighty we will also make it to the final. I'm ready to give my best if I get an opportunity to play the next game," said a beaming Taskin, who played the New Zealand game and claimed two wickets.

## Asian rivals face battle to the death

Pak-SL set for 'quarterfinal' today

**AFP, Cardiff**

Pakistan and Sri Lanka head into their concluding group Champions Trophy match knowing it's a virtual 'quarterfinal' after producing two of the tournament's biggest upsets so far.

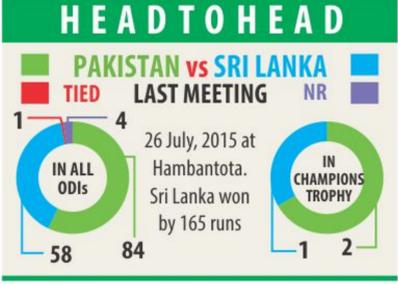
Monday's match in Cardiff has the look of a 'dead rubber' but it after Pakistan suffered a 124-run thrashing by arch-rivals and Champions Trophy title-holders India in their opening Group B match.

But now, in the words of Sri Lanka captain Angelo Mathews, the final round of fixtures in this pool are a "must-win game for all of us in the group".

Sri Lanka too suffered almost as heavy a loss in going down by 96 runs to South Africa first up in a tournament featuring the world's top eight one-day international teams.

But Pakistan bounced back to beat top-ranked South Africa by 19 runs on Wednesday at Edgbaston -- the ground where they had succumbed to India just days earlier.

And 24 hours later, Sri Lanka had a winning return at the Oval courtesy of a stunning seven-



wicket success against India.

Having conceded 319 for three against India, Pakistan restricted South Africa to 219 for eight.

After the spinners did the initial damage, paceman Hasan Ali took three for 24 in eight overs.

Babar Azam and Shoaib Malik then got Pakistan ahead of their required run-rate to secure a 19-run win under the Duckworth-Lewis-Stern method when rain stopped play with their side 119 for three off 27 overs.

Trying to explain the turnaround in his team's fortunes, Pakistan captain Sarfraz Ahmed said:

"We had a good bowling meeting. "We took wickets. If you take wickets, every good team feels under pressure."

Pakistan were also inspired by playing in front of a partisan crowd, something they have rarely enjoyed since a 2009 terror attack on the Sri Lanka team bus in Lahore led to them playing most of their major matches overseas.

"That is a feeling we miss, not playing in Pakistan," said Sarfraz.

"Maybe that was a difference, the crowd was supporting us and that's why the players were boosted."

Sri Lanka too did not lack for support at the Oval as they turned the tables on India in dramatic fashion.

Set 322 to win, Sri Lanka knocked off the runs with eight balls to spare thanks to contributions from Kusal Mendis (89), Danushka Gunathilaka (76) and all-rounder Mathews (52).

"It's one of the top wins, to beat India," said Mathews. "The bowlers did brilliantly to restrict India to 321. It was a very chaseable target."

"Not many people expected us to win and that took a lot of pressure off us."

Monday's match is the only Group B fixture taking place in Cardiff.

## Mamunul asked to show cause

**SPORTS REPORTER**

Footballer Mamunul Islam has been served a show-cause notice recently by Chittagong Abahani, asking why he returned to the team hotel at midnight before the June 6 Walton Federation Cup final.

The national team captain was asked to reply within 72 hours.

"Mamunul was outside the hotel without prior notice and returned to his room at midnight, thus he performed poorly in the Federation Cup final the next day," said Chittagong Abahani manager Arman Aziz while informing that Mamunul had received the show-cause on Saturday.

Chittagong Abahani suffered a 3-1 defeat to Dhaka Abahani in the final as they failed to become the first club from outside Dhaka to lift the Federation Cup.

"It was a misunderstanding. I left the hotel to take my sick mother-in-law to the hospital that night and I informed the coach [Saiful Bari Titu]. After taking her to the hospital, I returned at about 11:30pm," Mamunul explained as the reason. "No player of Chittagong Abahani could perform in the final, so why am I singled out among 11 players?"

Mamunul added that he would reply to the show-cause notice within the timeframe given.



SA-IND SCOREBOARD					
SOUTH AFRICA		R/B	45/65		
De Kock	b Jadeja	53/72	4/0		
Amla	c Dhoni b Ashwin	35/54	3/1		
Du Plessis	b Pandya	36/50	1/0		
De Villiers	run out	16/12	1/0		
Miller	run out	1/3	0/0		
Duminy	run out	20/41	1/0		
Morris	c Kumar b Bumrah	4/8	0/0		
Phehlukwayo	lbw b Bumrah	4/11	0/0		
Rabada	c Dhoni b Kumar	5/8	1/0		
M Morkel	c Kohli b Kumar	0/1	0/0		
Tahir	run out	1/7	0/0		
Extras	(lb-6, w-10)	16			
Total	(All out in 44.3 overs)	191			
Fall of wickets: 1-76, 2-116, 3-140, 4-142, 5-157, 6-167, 7-178, 8-184, 9-184, 10-191.					
INDIA		R/B	45/65		
Sharma	c De Kock b Morkel	12/20	1/1		
Dhawan	c Du Plessis b Tahir	78/83	12/1		
Kohli	not out	76/101	7/1		
Yuvraj	not out	23/25	1/1		
Extras	(lb-2, w-1, nb-1)	4			
Total	(For 2 wickets in 38 overs)	193			
Did not bat: Dhoni, Pandya, Jadeja, Kumar, Ashwin, Bumrah.					
Fall of wickets: 1-23, 2-151.					
Bowler		O	M	R	W
Rabada		9	2	34	0
M Morkel		7	1	38	1
Phehlukwayo		5	0	25	0
Morris		8	0	40	0
Tahir		6	0	37	1
Duminy		3	0	17	0