

# SPORT



After a long and mixed tour of the British Isles the Bangladesh team, led by captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (L), set off on the return journey from Birmingham yesterday at 2.20pm local time. When they return home today at 8.40am, among the issues to ponder will be the non-performance of youngsters like Sabbir Rahman (R) and Soumya Sarkar (Not in picture).



PHOTOS: ICB

## Tigers return with a lot still to do

Sports Reporter



The Tigers return home today after spending nearly seven weeks away. Most of the cricketers, including captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, will arrive in the morning while Shakib Al Hasan and Mahmudullah Riyad, the two heroes who took Bangladesh to the semifinal of the ICC Champions Trophy, took a different flight and will land in the afternoon. Mushfiqur Rahim and Imrul Kayes will come later as they will spend some more time abroad and enjoy a two-week break; they will return to business for the two-match Test series against Australia at home in August.

It was April 26 night when the Tigers left Dhaka to take part in a 10-day training camp at Sussex as part of their preparations for the tri-nation series in Ireland and the Champions Trophy in England. They will now return home with three wins from eight games and a promotion to the number six position in the ICC ODI rankings. During the long trip the Mashrafe-led side defeated Ireland and a below-strength New Zealand in the tri-series in Ireland and clinched a famous five-wicket victory against a full-strength New Zealand to reach a maiden semifinal at an ICC flagship event.

The Tigers were however far from their best

performance and were unable to capitalise on their biggest opportunity on the global stage as India posted a massive nine-wicket victory to send the Tigers home early.

Bangladesh were supposed to play a full series against Pakistan at home in July-August this year but the Pakistan Cricket Board has postponed the tour indefinitely, so now the Tigers will shift their focus exclusively to Test cricket as Australia will arrive here on August 18 to play two Tests in Dhaka and Chittagong.

For the Tigers nothing can be better than to show their recent improvement Test cricket, so they definitely will try to make sure that they leave no stone unturned for the two-match Test series against a strong Australia.

But the Tigers' performances in the just-concluded tri-series and ICC Champions Trophy gave enough evidence that this team will need to improve a lot if they want to take their performance to another height in the next World Cup in 2019, also in England.

Without any doubt, reaching the semifinal in the ICC Champions Trophy was a big achievement but there were a lot of things during their matches against England, Australia and even against New Zealand which will need to be addressed when Chittagong's Hashimullah Khan is to outline a strategy for the 2019 mission.

So, the Tigers are returning home with a lot of work on their hands.

## Aus to arrive on Aug 18

Star ruled out of 13-man squad for two-Test tour

Alp Sydney



Pace spearhead Mitchell Starc was ruled out as Australia confirmed their upcoming Test tour of Bangladesh on Friday, two years after their last visit was cancelled over security fears.

Starc, who suffered a foot injury in March, was omitted from the 13-man squad to rest for September's one-day series in India and the home Ashes series against England later in the year.

The team was also announced despite a long-running revenue-sharing dispute between Cricket Australia and the players' union ahead of the expiry of their current deal on June 30.

The original tour in 2015 was cancelled after a spate of attacks by Islamist extremists in the Muslim-majority nation.

But Cricket Australia executive general manager Pat Howard said Australia has received security assurances from Bangladesh's cricket board and government.

The trip in August and September will be Australia's first Test tour of Bangladesh since Ricky Ponting's team visited in 2006.



MITCHELL STARC

"Our number one priority will always be the safety and security of our players and support staff when travelling to any country," Howard said.

"Selectors have chosen this Bangladesh squad irrespective and independent of the status of the MOU (memorandum of understanding)," Howard said in a statement.

"We are working towards a resolution being in place by 30 June and look forward to continuing to support these players to perform at their very best on the global stage."

Starc was ruled out after follow-up scans after the Champions Trophy indicated his previous stress fracture hadn't properly healed.

The squad will be increased to 14 players to allow selectors to add a replacement for Starc.

Ashdon Agar was chosen ahead of Steve O'Keefe as Nathan Lyon's spinning partner, while all-rounder Hilton Cartwright was recalled.

Australia will arrive on August 18 and play a two-day tour match in Fathallah four days later. The two Tests against Bangladesh will be in Dhaka and Chittagong on August 27 and September 4.

ALAM from Birmingham



How well did Bangladesh fare in the Champions Trophy? In terms of results, it was the best performance for the Tigers in an ICC flagship event. They made it into the semifinals from a group they started as rank outsiders.

Although rain played a big part in their progress to the last four, Bangladesh's victory against New Zealand in their last group game was one of the most spectacular come-from-behind stories in one-day cricket history.

They scored more than 300 runs in the tournament opener against hosts England. Opener Tamim Iqbal was in the best of form in the tournament. The left-hander hit a magnificent 128 against England and then followed it up with a fabulous 95 against the Aussies in the rain-abandoned second game. He scored a duck against New Zealand but returned to his brilliant self against India in the semifinal with 70. Mushfiqur Rahim struck two superb half-centuries.

Shakib's stupendous 114 and Mahmudullah's mastery 102 in that amazing 224-run fifth-wicket stand against New Zealand was Bangladesh's highest partnership for any wicket in ODI cricket. The bowling unit also performed well in that particular game, where they

restricted the Black Caps to 265. The semifinal might have turned out to be a mismatch, but it could have been different had Tamim and Mushfiqur built on their century stand. Still, what Bangladesh have done in the tournament suggests that they are on the right track as a developing team.

But if you ask premier all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, he will tell you that

they did not perform that well.

"I don't think we have done well as a team. We were outplayed in the first game and also in this [semifinal] match. We have won against New Zealand and that was a good thing. We have also been outplayed in the game [abandoned] against Australia," Shakib told reporters after Thursday's crushing semifinal defeat against India.

few overs away from certain defeat before rain saved them against Australia.

"We have come a long way. But at the same time we still have a long way to go if we are to compete in big tournaments against big teams. We have to improve in a lot of areas," Shakib observed.

He was also specific while detailing the areas where Bangladesh still

lag behind in big-match situations. "If you look at the big matches, even if they are defending 270-80, they restrict the opposition on a flat wicket. But we can't do that; we need assistance from the wicket. At the same time, it is also not possible for us to out-bat an opponent. It was also the case today when we should have scored 330 and ended up 70-80 runs short," said the all-rounder.

"The big teams do not commit themselves. They don't give you any chance once they get settled. When we do well we do it collectively but there are areas we still either have not learnt or can't do," the Tigers' vice-captain observed.

Bangladesh came unstuck in the semifinal two years after the World Cup quarterfinal against the same opposition. According to Shakib, it's more of a mental barrier than skill or technique that they need to overcome. He also said that he was not sure if they had the belief that they could cross the semifinal hurdle.

Shib also said that it was not the right time to think about future plans, immediately after a demoralising defeat.

"After a game, especially after a defeat, if I want to say something about the future, it will be all the negative thoughts will come to my mind. We should take a break and then sit together to decide the future course of action," concluded



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ITINERARY		SQUAD	
DATE	MATCH	VENUE	
August 22-23	Two-Day Practice Match	KSADS, Fathallah	
August 27-31	First Test	SANCS, Dhaka	
September 04-08	Second Test	ZKS, Cric	

Steve Smith (capt), David Warner, Ashton Agar, Hilton Cartwright, Pat Cummins, Peter Handscomb, Josh Hazlewood, Usman Khawaja, Nathan Lyon, Glenn Maxwell, James Pattinson, Matthew Renshaw, Matthew Wade.

## HISTORY CAN CHANGE: MAHMOOD

Alp London



Pakistan are ready to change the course of history in a clash that's bigger than the Ashes when they face arch-rivals India in the Champions Trophy final.

Title-holders India will be firm favourites against Pakistan side who were the lowest ranked of all the teams taking part in a tournament featuring the world's top-eight one-day international sides.

It was only on June 4 that India launched their title defence with a 124-run rout of Pakistan at Edgbaston.

Yet even by their own 'unpredictable' standards, Pakistan's transformation since that reverse has been remarkable and on Wednesday they knocked previously unbeaten tournament hosts England out of the competition with a comprehensive eighth-wicket win in Cardiff.

Pakistan have yet to play a match at The Oval this tournament but in bowling coach Azhar Mahmood, they have someone familiar with all the vagaries of the London ground.

"We've got nothing to lose -- the pressure is more on them," Azhar told reporters at the Oval on Friday.

"They are ranked higher than us -- so everyone is talking about India, India.

But I can tell you one thing -- we have come to win."

India have won all three of their previous matches with Pakistan in the knockout stages of ICC tournaments to date.

"India have the upper hand in ICC tournaments," he admitted before adding: "But things can change, and this is the time for us to change the fact that we don't perform well at ICC events. History can change, and I hope we can (change it)."

"It is massive," said Azhar. "India refuse to play against us [in Pakistan's adopted home of the United Arab Emirates]."

"But on the biggest stage it is India v Pakistan. It is like the Ashes -- it is bigger than the Ashes -- and expectation is high from both nations, crazy about cricket."

"The pressure is high for both sides and this is a dream final for the sponsors and the broadcasters," he added.

"This is the game they want, but it is up to us how we handle the pressure on the day."

And he insisted a Pakistan victory would be no great surprise. "It wouldn't be a shock if we won. No one gave us a hope when we got here."

"But someone asked me before the tournament who would be in the final and I said Pakistan," Azhar insisted.

"I believe in my boys ... if we win it would be a great gift to the whole nation."

Pakistan's already strong bowling line-up is set to receive a boost with the return of pacer Mohammad Amir, who missed the semifinal against England due to injury. Amir trained with the team at The Oval yesterday.

**Ad rates skyrocket for Ind-Pak final**

RUBEN, New Delhi

Television advertising rates for Sunday's cricket final between India and Pakistan are 10 times the normal price, industry sources said, as millions of fans are expected to tune in for a clash that last time ranked among the six most-watched sporting events.

Pakistan, the lowest-ranked team at the Champions Trophy tournament, upset host and favourites England to set up a final with defending champions India, feeding a frenzy for a game that commands a fanatical following in the region and among its diaspora.

A 30-second spot during the final to be broadcast by Rupert Murdoch's Star Sports is expected to cost nearly 10 million rupees (\$155,267), far higher than the 1 million rupees that advertisers pay on average for most Indian

shows, said a person involved in buying ads.

Most of the TV spots for the final, to be played in London, were pre-booked with firms such as Nissan Motor, Intel Corp, Emirates, Chinese mobile maker Oppo and Indian tyre maker MRF signed up as commercial partners for the tournament.

Fewer than 10 percent of the slots are left for the final, a person in the sports broadcasting industry said.

Companies still wanting to air their ads will be paying a higher rate than those who pre-booked, said the person, who did not want to be named, citing business confidentiality.

Before the Champions Trophy, the last time India and Pakistan played a one-day international was during the 2015 World Cup. That game, won by India, was one of the top-six most



Pakistan bowling coach Azhar Mahmood was confident that his charges will be more than a match for the more-fancied India in the Champions Trophy final at The Oval on Sunday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

viewed sporting events, along with the soccer World Cup final and Usain Bolt's 100-metre sprint at the 2012 Olympic Games, the sports broadcasting industry source said.

**'Not much needs to change for Pak final'**

PTI, Birmingham

Pakistan's 'magnificent turnaround' has impressed him but India captain Virat Kohli says there is nothing that his side needs to be overly concerned about ahead of the Champions Trophy final against the arch-foes on Sunday.

"What we are going to try to do is repeat the similar sort of cricket that we have played so far, knowing the strengths and weaknesses they have. Obviously, we will have to plan a bit according to that, but I don't know if there's much that we need to change as a team," he said.

Asked if India made a statement to their bitter rivals with the nine-wicket triumph over Bangladesh on Thursday, Kohli dismissed the suggestion.

There are no statements in this game, honestly. On the day you arrive, if you are not feeling well mentally, it doesn't matter whether you are 100 or whether you had a convincing victory.

He was all praise for Pakistan team's