

# 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).



## Tigers return with a lot still to do

Sports Report

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. Mashrafi 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-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 Mashrafi-led side defeated Ireland and a below-strength New Zealand in the tri-series and clinched a famous five-wicket victory against a full-strength New Zealand to reach a maiden semifinal at an ICC flagships 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. Australia will play a two-match Test on August 16-18 at the Oval in London and Chelmsford.

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 Chandika Hathurusingha sits down 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

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

AFP, Sydney

Pace spearhead Mitchell Starc was ruled out of Australia's 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 England 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

### ITINERARY

DATE	MATCH	VENUE
August 22-23	Two-Day Practice Match	KSOS, Fatullah
August 27-31	First Test	SBNS, Dhaka
September 04-08	Second Test	ZACCS, Ctg

### SQUAD

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.

## We have a long way to go: Shakib

AL-Amin 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 part in their defeat, it was 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 125 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. Mashrafi Rahim struck two superb half-centuries.

Shakib's sumptuous 114 and Mahmudullah's masterly 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 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.

It was an honest admission from a player who wants his team to be as good as the big teams in the world. In that context Bangladesh still lack that mental maturity needed to transform from a lightweight to a heavyweight.

He was correct to point out that Bangladesh have won only one game in the tournament. They badly lost against England; they were only

lag behind in big-match situations.

"If you look at the big teams, even if they are restricted by 270-80, they still 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 these kinds of mistakes. 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.

Shakib 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 how we should plan for 2019 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



four 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 will have to improve in a lot of areas," Shakib observed.

He was also specific while detailing the areas where Bangladesh still

## HISTORY CAN CHANGE: MAHMOOD

AFP, London

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 tag 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 [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 their countries... it 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.

At rates skyrocket for Ind-Pak final

Reuters, 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 hosts and favourites England to set up a final in 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 for 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 one 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

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'**

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 is to 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 that their rivals will benefit from 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



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