



## ‘Thinking only about cricket’

SPORTS REPORTER from Colombo



For both Bangladesh and hosts Sri Lanka, the importance of winning the upcoming three-match ODI series between the sides was made clear during the grand pre-series press conference at the Taj Samudra Hotel in Colombo yesterday. The captains and coaches of the two teams were present alongside the secretary of Sri Lanka Cricket at the event.

A series win would mark a strong comeback for both Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, who endured rather disappointing campaigns in the just concluded ICC Cricket World Cup in the United Kingdom. However, from Sri Lanka's point of view, this series bears a special significance as the island nation hopes to overcome the deadly Easter Sunday (April 21) bombings earlier this year which shook the entire nation.

Bangladesh, being the first team to tour Sri Lanka following the attack, is being appreciated deeply by the Sri Lankan cricket board as well as the people of the country.

Tigers' stand-in skipper Tamim Iqbal did well to rouse the Sri Lankan media after arriving in the country.

"Everybody was really positive (to tour Sri Lanka) and looked forward to come here. Not many years ago we were in a pretty similar situation. Sri Lanka was the one team who came to our country and we had a beautiful series that time. We have been looked after really well security wise along with all the facilities and there

is nothing aside from cricket that we are thinking about at the moment," Tamim said during his opening speech to much applause from the audience yesterday.

On the other hand, there were some more critical questions for incumbent Sri Lanka head coach Chandika Hathurusingha, who was repeatedly asked whether or not he will quit his job after the series after the Sri Lankan Sports minister publicly stated that they need to change the coaching staff following their World Cup failure.

Bangladesh are without regular skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, who was ruled out in the last moment due to a hamstring injury, while the outstanding performer of the World Cup, Shakib Al Hasan, will also miss out as he had earlier asked for a leave.

According to Tamim however, he does not want to focus on an individual who is not with the team at the moment and rather backed the 14-members present in the side to prove their worth.

"The players who were picked for the team all are capable and I really don't want to talk about someone who is not in the team at the moment. He has done fantastically well for Bangladesh but he is not here with the team so let's not talk about him as I got another 14 players and they all are capable," he said.

Bangladesh will take part in a practice match against the SLC XI today at the P Sara Oval, where according to Tamim, the team management will look to form the best possible combination for the first ODI on July 26.



Bangladesh cricket team's stand-in captain Tamim Iqbal (R) and interim coach Khaled Mahmud (C) have a chat with Sri Lanka coach Chandika Hathurusingha at the Taj Hotel in Colombo yesterday.

PHOTO: MAZHAR UDDIN

## Not the Sri Lanka of the past

MAZHAR UDDIN from Colombo

Life in Sri Lanka was not the same as it was during my last trip to the island nation just last year as the seemingly laidback and warm nature of the locals had turned into a rather suspicious one with steely glares being shot about every now and then.

Things changed dramatically in Sri Lanka after a series of horrifying suicide bombings on three churches and four hotels in Colombo on Easter Sunday (April 21) earlier this year claimed the lives of over 250 while another 500 were left wounded.

The attack was the deadliest event to take place since the Sri Lankan civil war ten years ago. In response, the Sri Lankan government beefed up the security to such an extent that you could find armed forces almost in almost every corner in Colombo.

Three months on, it may seem like Sri Lanka have managed to overcome the horrible tragedy, much like they had after the tsunami in 2004 and the civil war, which lasted nearly

thirty years. In reality however, there a sense of fear and foreboding still seems to cling to people of the city.

Security checkpoints are found around almost every corner and anyone that arouses suspicion is checked thoroughly by special armed forces. The case was very different just six months back.

During a taxi drive from the airport to the hotel, the chauffeur, Herath Silva, initiated a conversation on the matter.

"You know we are yet to overcome the damage of that suicide bombing on Easter Sunday. There is still a sense of fear among the people of this country as the incident was a manmade catastrophe. How can you stop yourself from thinking that perhaps tomorrow someone might once again come up with a suicide bomb and blast it in a temple or even a mosque?" said Silva.

Herath went on to elaborate that the after effects of the horrific incident not only hampered daily

life but it also negatively impacted the economy, shaking the country from its foundations.

"Since that attack the business has gone down to zero. Sri Lanka is known for its scenic beauty and is one of the top destinations for tourists but since that attack, the number of tourists travelling to our country has decreased drastically," Herath, with his eyes heavy with disappointment, explained.

This reporter even got a first-hand experience of how the stringent security measures need to be handled after arriving to cover Bangladesh's three-match ODI series against Sri Lanka. It should be mentioned here though that Bangladesh are the first international team to visit the country since the Easter attacks.

Although the fact that the Bangladesh team were provided with top-class security may be the call of the hour, this is quite unlike how it usually is in Sri Lanka, where

fans and journalists from abroad were one able carry out their duties with relative ease.

As mentioned above, things have changed and the journalists from Bangladesh were barred entrance from the R Premadasa Stadium, where the Tigers were participating in a training session, yesterday. However, possibly due to the tight security, the Sri Lanka Cricket officials were yet to issue accreditation cards for the touring media.

The security was just as strict at the Tigers' team hotel, the Taj Samudra, as you were made to pass at least three security checks before even entering the hotel. In addition, armed body guards were assigned to remain with each member of the Bangladesh team round the clock.

From Sri Lanka's point of view, the government is trying their level best to bring back normalcy but only time will tell how long it will take for the people of this country to return to business as usual.

## I will fix the Pak cricket team: Imran

AGENCIES, Washington

Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan said on Monday that he will fix the Pakistan cricket team after the side was unable to reach the semifinals of the recently concluded ICC World Cup 2019. The Sarfaraz Ahmed-led team had an extremely inconsistent run in the competition and were fifth in the table with 11 points. They were tied with eventual runners-up New Zealand but missed out on the knockout spot due to inferior net run-rate.

"I went to England where I learned to play cricket. When we returned from there we raised the standard of other players. After the World Cup I have decided that I will fix the Pakistan cricket team," Prime Minister Imran Khan told a packed arena of overseas Pakistanis.

"The team you see in the next World Cup, remember my words that team will be a professional team. We will fix the system and bring one in which the best talent comes forward," he added. Pakistan could have separate captains and head coaches for Test and limited overs cricket following its failure to qualify for the World Cup semifinals in England.

A well-placed source in the Pakistan Cricket Board told PTI that when the Cricket Committee meets later this month, a proposal to split the captaincy and coaching for the different formats would be up for discussion.

## ‘If we’d lost, I didn’t know how I’d play cricket again’

ICC



Zealand last week.

While England went on to win the tournament and lift their maiden men's World Cup, Buttler, who scored 59 runs and affected a match-winning run-out, needed counsel from team psychologist David Young before the game.

"I had played in eight finals before Sunday and lost seven of them," Buttler told the Daily Mail. "I'd played in lots with Somerset, the Champions Trophy with England and when we lost the [World] T20 [final] in Kolkata. I knew how much it hurt watching the other team lift the trophy. I didn't want to feel that pain and that regret again."

Since crashing out in the group stage of the 2015 World Cup, England underwent an ODI revolution with the sole aim of lifting the trophy at Lord's

four years later. They rose to the top of the MRF Tyres ICC ODI Rankings and were one of the favourites to win the tournament. With the dream final before a home crowd turning into reality, Buttler found himself overawed by the historic occasion.

"What was scaring me was if we lost, I didn't know how I'd play cricket again," he explained. "This was such a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, a World Cup final at Lord's. It felt like destiny and I was thinking: 'If it doesn't happen, I will have no motivation to pick up a cricket bat for a very long time.'"

"When I was talking to David, I knew the answers. I knew all I could look after was the stuff I could look after, and I needed to get into my zone, which allows me to perform the best I can. But what happens if it goes wrong?"

Buttler had similar worries in the group stage as well, when England had needed to win at least two of their last three games to ensure qualification into the knockouts. Defeats to Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Australia had put them in a difficult position.



JOS BUTTLER

## Shohidul fifer powers BCB XI

SPORTS REPORTER

Shohidul Islam picked up a fifer to help BCB XI end the first day of their four-day match against KSCA Secretaries XI in the Dr (Capt) K. Thimmappiah Memorial tournament on a high note at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium in India yesterday.

Right-arm pacer Shohidul ran riot, bagging five wickets for just 20 runs to help bundle out Secretaries XI on a meagre 79-run total in 41 overs.

Asked to bat, Secretaries XI never seemed to find the groove as they kept losing wickets at regular intervals. A team high 69-ball 18 from tail-enders KS Devaiah was one of only three scores to cross the 10-run mark on the day.

BCB XI took a lead of 56 runs in their first innings, ending with 135 for three. Opener Shadman Islam scored 59 runs off 93 balls while Jahurul Islam and Najmul Hossain remained unbeaten on 28 and 27 respectively.

## BD U-19s tear through Eng

SPORTS REPORTER

An unbeaten 85-ball 66 from Towhid Hridoy helped Bangladesh Under-19s register a commanding six-wicket victory against England Under-19s during an encounter in a tri-nation series -- featuring Under-19 teams from Bangladesh, England and India -- at the County Ground, New Road in Worcester yesterday.

After electing to bat, England suffered a batting collapse that saw the hosts reeling on six for 87 in the 27th over. A 111-run seventh-wicket stand between Lewis Goldsworthy and Kasey Aldridge helped England avert humiliation and post a modest 200 for seven. For Bangladesh, Tanzim Hasan was the pick of the bowlers, returning impressive figures of four for 49.

After the exchange, Bangladesh had lost three wickets for 72 runs by the 16th over, however, a 114-run fourth-wicket stand between Towhid and Shahadat Hossain helped the young Tigers easily reach victory with 71 balls to spare.



## Smith raring to go

REUTERS, Southampton



Sixteen months after leaving Test cricket in disgrace over the ball-tampering furore, Steve Smith's preparations for the Ashes have gone up to a manic level as the former skipper looks to return to red ball cricket in top form.

Australia captain Tim Paine said former skipper Smith had given batting coach Graeme Hick long and taxing work-outs in the nets as he looks to hone his formidable game ahead of the Ashes opener in Edgbaston on August 1.

Renowned for his obsessive approach to training, Smith is back in the Test squad along with David Warner and Cameron Bancroft, the other two players hit with long bans for their involvement in the Cape Town scandal in March, 2018.

"You don't become one of the best players in the world and average 60 in Test cricket if you don't have some sort of a mission," Paine told reporters of Smith at the team's training base in Southampton.

"The boys have been having a bit of a laugh the last couple of days because nothing's changed - he's hit a million balls and our coach's arm is falling off already on day two of the trip.

"It's great to see that him, and David (Warner) and Cameron Bancroft have come back in and fitted perfectly in our group.

"They are guys who have always trained at exceptionally high standards and set the standard for others.

"The three of them have been outstanding since they've been back and involved."

Australia are bidding to retain the urn and erase the disappointment of their one-day World Cup campaign, which ended in the semifinals at the hands of hosts and eventual champions England.

Australia will play a four-day intra-squad match starting on Tuesday, with two sides padded out by Australia A players.

With the final Ashes squad to be named after, Paine said it would be no gentle hit in the park.