

Victoria denied
Crucial tie with MSC today

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Holders Victoria Sporting Club will go into their potential title decider of the GrameenPhone Premier Cricket Super League...

The CCDM (Cricketer Committee of Dhaka Metropolitan) in an emergency meeting yesterday ruled out Victoria's plea for a replacement of choice for Manjarul...

It was learnt that Victoria officials have asked for any national cricketer from a list of four, namely Alok Kapali, Mohammad Rafique, Khaleed Mashud and Sanwar Hossain.

But CCDM secretary Jamil A Sattar said after the meeting that they were unable to provide Victoria with any national cricketer as Manjarul's replacement since

the southpaw never played for the national team.

"We had proposed four names as replacement for Manjarul, but it was turned down on the ground that our desired cricketers were superior in stature compared to him," said a dejected Victoria cricketer secretary MA Kabir after the meeting.

Although the CCDM ruling was not unexpected, however Victoria definitely deserved a better treatment from the ruling body of Dhaka cricket for their goodwill gesture.

They let Manjarul go following a verbal assurance from the Development Committee of the BCB that they would get a good replacement for the young all-rounder.

But after lot of drama over the last couple of Victoria were left biting the dust.

"The meeting was an eye wash and it was called at a time when we had no time to seek an alternative option," added Kabir. The CCDM convened the emergency meeting at noon yesterday when many felt

that it could have been arranged earlier.

"But we will play tomorrow (today) no matter what," vowed Kabir.

Victoria will walk into the Bangabandhu National Stadium to play their penultimate match needing only two points to retain the title.

The four-day match starts at 9:30 am.

The game is very crucial as far as the championship is concerned. Victoria are leading the table with 72 points from 15 matches. A win or a first innings lead against Mohammedan, who have 68 points from 16 matches, will ensure the centenary club their second Premier League title in successive seasons.

If they lose this match, they will still have a chance to retain the title in their final match against City Club.

On the other hand, Mohammedan, who are playing their last



Victoria cricketers warm up with a game of football during practice at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.



Mohammedan captain Minhazul Abedin talks with teammate and national opener Javed Omar during a practice session at the NSC ground at Arambagh yesterday.



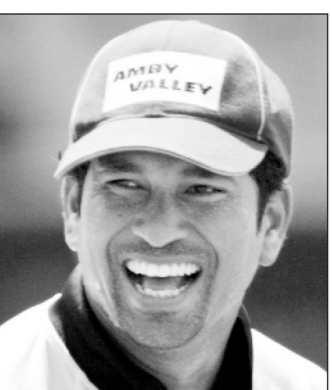
Did U Know?

West Indian Gary Sobers, who scored 8,032 runs in 93 Tests, did not score a single run in one-day internationals. He was out for a duck off six balls in the only one-day international he played in.



What to WATCH

- ESPN UEFA Champions League Real Madrid vs Juventus Repeat at 8:30 am & AC Milan vs Inter Milan Repeat at 12:00 pm Sportscentre Hindi Sports News Live at 8:30 pm STAR Sports Sportline Tonight Sports News Live at 8:00 pm



Sachin Tendulkar

(Indian star batsman) "All I want to do is to go on and on. It's hard to imagine life without cricket."

Aussie one-day experts to go to Windies

World Cup champions Australia will fly a quartet of one-day specialists including Michael Bevan to Antigua on Friday for the limited-overs series against the West Indies starting next week. Bevan, rated by cricket magazine Wisden as the fifth-best one-day batsman of all time, will join all-rounders Andrew Symonds and Ian Harvey and off-spinner Nathan Hauritz on flights to the West Indies via London, the Australian Cricket Board announced in a statement on Wednesday. Left-handed batsman Bevan has hit 5,807 runs at an average of 54.78 in 186 one-day international matches including six hundreds. The 32-year-old averages little more than half that figure (29.07) with no centuries in his 18 Tests and has not played a Test for five years.

School cricket
Islamia oust Comilla

SPORTS REPORTER

Last year's runners-up Comilla High School were eliminated from the Standard Charter Bank 21st National School Cricket Championship when Islamia High School of Gaibandha handed them a three-wicket defeat at the City Club ground at Mirpur yesterday.

Chasing a not-so-impressive Comilla total of 144 in 50 overs, the Islamia boys scored 147 for the loss of seven wickets with 15.4 overs yet to be bowled. The win also secured them a berth in the quarterfinals.

Abu Taher laid the foundation for the winners with an elegant 47 and useful contributions also came from Abu Nayeem and Chanchal, both adding 22 runs each.

Islamia apart, Muradpur High School of Dhaka and Multi Letter High School of Sirajganj also made their ways into the last eight.

Muradpur defeated Khagrachari Government High by five wickets in a reduced 25-overs-a-side match at the Dhamondi Cricket Stadium while Multi Letter registered a 94-run win over Barguna High at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium.

In the other match of the day, Parjor Kalindi High School earned walk-over against Saint Joseph's High School of Khulna as the latter did not turn up for the match at the Jagannath Hall ground of Dhaka

University. SCORES IN BRIEF Comilla High School v Islamia High School Venue: City Club. COMILLA HIGH SCHOOL: 144 all out in 34.5 overs (Mrittujan 34, Azhar 22, Abu Nayeem 3-29) ISLAMIA HIGH SCHOOL: 147 for 7 in 34.2 overs (Abu Taher 45, Abu Nayeem 22, Chanchal 22, Rashid 3-18) Result: Islamia High School won by three wickets. Khagrachari Govt High School v Muradpur High School Venue: DCS. KHAGRACHARI GOVT HIGH SCHOOL: 113 for 9 in 25 overs (Sumit 24, Shufal 21, Arif 3-30) MURADPUR HIGH SCHOOL: 116 for 5 in 23.2 overs (Mehdi 34, Jewel 30, Shufal 2-18) Result: Muradpur High School won by five wickets. Multi Letter High School v Barguna High School Venue: FCS. MULTI LETTER HIGH SCHOOL: 189 all out in 44.1 overs (Rubel 30, Sabuj 26, Real 25, Sohag 3-29) BARGUNA HIGH SCHOOL: 95 all out in 36.4 overs (Shaon 27, Real 3-13, Halim 2-15) Result: Multi Letter High School won by 94 runs.

Asia Cup finally?
No cricket against Pakistan soon: India

AFP/REUTERS, undated

A thaw in ties between India and Pakistan has raised hopes of finally holding the twice-postponed Asia Cup tournament, an ACC official said here Wednesday.

"We are hoping to hold the Asia Cup in the first week of April 2004," Syed Ashraf Huq, chief executive of the Asian Cricket Council (ACC), told AFP during a stopover in Dhaka on his way to Malaysia.

"It may even be held in Pakistan, the original venue, instead of Sri Lanka ... but it all depends on a lot of things."

"We will also try to organise an ice-breaking match in September this year provided India allows its team to play against Pakistan," said Huq, a former Bangladesh national cricketer.

He also said that India and Pakistan's cricket chiefs Jagmohan Dalmiya and Lieutenant General Tauqir Zia, respectively, met at the weekend on the sidelines of the Asian Cricket Foundation meeting in Dubai.

Officials and observers on both

sides are optimistic that cricketing ties between India and Pakistan would soon be resumed as diplomatic ties appear to be on the mend.

Pakistan last month pulled out of the Asia Cup in Sri Lanka after the Indian government refused its team permission to play a scheduled Test series in Pakistan in protest at Islamabad's alleged support of militancy in Kashmir.

The Indian team, however, is allowed to play Pakistan in multi-national events, like the World Cup and Asia Cup. The two sides met in the recent World Cup in South Africa in March.

However, the Indian government has ruled out immediate resumption of bilateral cricket ties with Pakistan despite signs of a thaw in relations between the two countries.

"It won't happen overnight," federal Sports Minister Vikram Verma told Reuters.

"It is not that the train service is resumed today and we can start playing (bilateral cricket) tomorrow," Verma said, adding that a

friendly atmosphere must be created first.

India and Pakistan have announced restoration of diplomatic ties and transport links as a prelude to talks to resolve their differences after being on the brink of a war over the disputed northern state of Kashmir.

The government banned bilateral games with Pakistan in 2000 because of political tension, but has not opposed playing each other in multilateral events of the International Cricket Council (ICC) like the World Cup.

Indian cricket officials last week appealed to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in an attempt to take advantage of the changing political climate.

But Verma said bilateral cricket would not be allowed until diplomatic and cultural relations improved.

The two teams last met in a bilateral series in 1999 and India called off its Test tour in April after the government refused to review its ban.

Peace on pitches, fields and courts

Cricket

AFP, Karachi

Pakistani sportsmen Wednesday hailed Prime Minister Zafarullah Jamali's sporting overtures to India, saying the best chances for peace between the sports-mad nations lay on pitches, fields and courts.

Among a host of tension-thawing moves announced late Tuesday by Jamali a former hockey player and national team selector were the revival of sports ties, with cricket and hockey designated to lead the way.

"Sports can be a unity binding force between Pakistan and India. Matches between them are tension packed and can bring the people of both the nations close," said Khalid Mahmood, former national hockey captain.

"Jamali, as I know, is a cool, balanced and sports-minded person," he said, recalling his days heading Punjab University's 1964 hockey team in which Jamali played left full back. "Jamali knows

the strength of sports."

India first severed sporting ties with Pakistan after the 1999 Kargil conflict, when Pakistan seized the Kargil heights in the Indian-controlled zone of Kashmir. It boycotted bilateral cricket and hockey series and twice pulled out of the biennial South Asia Federation (SAF) Games.

Jamali has also flagged a second attempt by Pakistan to host the SAF games, which it was scheduled to do in March. They were postponed on fears of a violent backlash to the US-led invasion of Iraq.

The two sides played annual hockey series until 1999. Since then they have only met in multi-national events.

The sport worst hit by the melt-down has been cricket.

On three occasions since 2000 India has refused to allow its team to cross the border.

The chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), Lieutenant General Tauqir Zia, said cricket could lead the path to peace.

"Once relations are normalised we believe cricket can top the confi

Draw, but dramatic

Cricket

AFP, Kandy

Muttiah Muralitharan claimed his 450th Test wicket, but could not prevent New Zealand from forcing a draw in the decisive second Test against Sri Lanka here on Wednesday.

The Sri Lankans, facing a one-day style chase of 191 in 38 overs, were 72-1 off 30 overs in a tame finish to an otherwise dramatic fifth and final day's play at the Asgiriya Stadium.

Sri Lanka abandoned the victory bid after aggressive opener Sanath Jayasuriya fell early to Shane Bond for nine.

Kumar Sangakkara remained unbeaten on 27 while Mahela Jayawardena made 32 not out in an

unbroken second wicket stand of 58.

The draw left the short two-match series inconclusive after the first Test at Colombo's Tamil Union ground ended in a high-scoring draw last week.

The rain-hit Kandy Test, which saw the first five sessions of play washed out, suddenly came to life on the fifth day when New Zealand were shot out for 183 in their second innings at the stroke of tea.

Muralitharan finished with 5-49, the 37th time he has taken five or more wickets in an innings to overtake New Zealand's Richard Hadlee's long-standing record of 36.

Only West Indian Courtney Walsh with 519 wickets and Australia's Shane Warne (491) have dismissed more batsmen in Test history than the prolific 80-Test off-spinner.

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Muralitharan's feat overshadowed a remarkable fightback by New Zealand tailenders Robbie Hart and Paul Wiseman who put on 40 valuable runs for the eight wicket.

The pair came together 15 minutes before lunch with their team tottering at 139-7 just 146 runs ahead and held their ground for 98 minutes to frustrate the hosts.

Wiseman was last man out for a career-best 29 while Hart made a dogged 12, both batsmen falling to left-arm seamer Chaminda Vaas, who ended with 3-31.

The match turned Sri Lanka's way when six New Zealand wickets crashed in the morning session after they had resumed at Tuesday's score of 92-1.

Sri Lanka's new captain Hashan Tillakaratne, who took over after

Lankan approach surprises Flemo

REUTERS, Kandy

New Zealand captain Stephen Fleming said he was surprised by Sri Lanka's negative approach during their drawn two-Test series that petered out tamely on Wednesday.

The hosts declined to chase a stiff 191 run target in 38 overs to win the series on the final day of the second Test. The two captains called off the game seven overs early with Sri Lanka on 72 for one.

"I thought they would have been more aggressive with us in their own backyard," Fleming told reporters.

"It was a pretty poor end to the Test match to be honest. We didn't have the ability to push on this morning and they didn't seem to want to win the Test."

"They had nothing to lose and I can't understand why they were not willing to push on further. We were certainly not going to bowl them out in 38 overs."

New Zealand started the final day with hopes of winning but they lost six wickets for 52 runs in the first session and were then forced to save the game in the afternoon.

"Last night we showed the urgency required but the key is that when you push harder you expose yourself and in the end we weren't skilful enough against a world-class bowler," Fleming added.

Sampras skips Hamburg meet

REUTERS, Berlin

Former world number one Pete Sampras has pulled out of next week's Hamburg Masters Series ATP tournament, organisers said on Tuesday.

Sampras has not played since beating fellow American Andre Agassi in the US Open final last September but the 31-year-old has not officially announced his retirement.

Menacing Muralitharan

Cricket

REUTERS, Kandy

Muttiah Muralitharan has his sights set on 600 Test wickets after his latest record-breaking exploits in the drawn second Test against New Zealand.

The 30-year-old Sri Lankan took his 450th Test wicket and a five-wicket haul for a world-record 37th time during the final day's play on Wednesday, taking five for 49 from 39 overs in his home town.

The controversial off spinner, who bowls with a permanently locked elbow and a unique wrist action, finished with a final match analysis of nine for 139.

"To reach 450 wickets here, in Kandy where I grew up, is very special for me," said Muralitharan. "I am happy but there is a long way to go as I want to play until 2007 and get to 600."

Muralitharan became the first bowler to take five wickets in an innings on 37 occasions, overtaking Kiwi fast bowler Richard Hadlee who claimed 36 five-wicket hauls.

He also holds the record for the most 10-wicket hauls, with 11 in 80 matches, and the 30-year-old lies third on the all-time wicket-takers' list.

Only former West Indies fast bowler Courtney Walsh (519) and banned Australian leg spinner Shane Warne (491) have taken more.

Muralitharan took 14 wickets in the two-Test series, a relatively lean haul for a bowler who usually thrives in Sri Lanka's spin-friendly conditions.

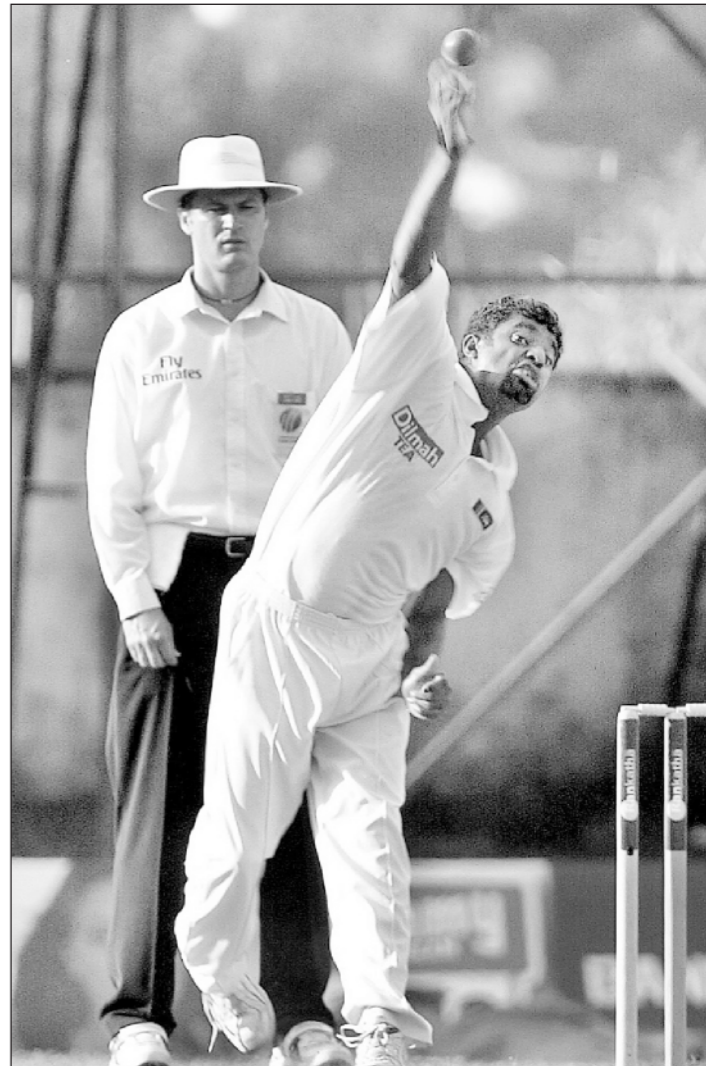
But Muralitharan believes it is now getting harder for him to take Test wickets.

"It is not easy to get wickets now in Test cricket, people have worked

me out like they do any world class bowler," said Muralitharan.

"In a negative way they (the New

Zealand batsmen) played me well, they never tried to attack though, I headed.



Record-breaking Sri Lankan off-spinner Muttiah Muralitharan lets go yet another venomous delivery on the fourth day of the Kandy Test on May 6. Yesterday he took four New Zealand wickets to add to his overnight one to claim five wickets in an innings for the 37th time, a world record.

Steve sees promise in West Indies

Cricket

REUTERS, Bridgetown

Australia captain Steve Waugh, whose team are on the brink of handing the West Indies their first whitewash in the Caribbean, still sees a bright future for his opponents.

"You need to give the guys time because there's a good deal of talent in the side."

Waugh's words will lend moral support to West Indies captain Brian Lara and the team selectors, who are under increasing pressure in the region to bring back more experienced players.

West Indies fielded two debutants, Barbadian fast bowler Tino Best and Anguillian off-spinner Omari Banks, in the third Test in a team with an average age of 25.

Australia have won their last eight Tests against the West Indies, having handed them a 5-0 whitewash in 2001 in Australia. Despite

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