

President to grace NFL finale

SPORTS REPORTER

President Professor Iajuddin Ahmed is expected to witness the final of the Nitol-Tata Fifth National Football League at the Bangabandhu National Stadium as chief guest on January 8.

The organisers, worried over small crowd presence, would be offering a lot of sideshows to attract the fans during the final, informed tournament committee chairman Matlub Ahmed, also the chairman of sponsors Nitol Group at a press conference at the BFF Bhaban yesterday.

Cheerleaders will be inspiring the teams as well as fans in different team colours during the semi-finals and the final, but the biggest attraction would be the 11 stars of "Close-up 1 Tomakei Khujche Bangladesh", who will be performing after the grand finale.

For the crowd there would be lottery-prizes including motorbike.

The winners will receive Tk 5 lakh as prize money and the runners-up will be richer by Tk 3 lakh. The player of the tournament will pocket Tk 50,000 and a motorbike while the organisers have yesterday announced Tk 25,000 for the top scorer.



Did U Know?

The five Olympic rings represent the five major regions of the world: Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe and Oceania and every national flag in the world includes one of the five colours, which are (from left to right) blue, yellow, black, green, and red.



Zaheer Khan

(India pace bowler)

"I have reduced my run up... This tour will be the first international stage when I will be bowling with the new style. I am a bit nervous and nervous but I hope it should be okay."

While revealing that he has developed a new bowling style for the upcoming series against Pakistan.

What to WATCH

ESPN

Sportscentre
Live at 8:30 pm

STAR Sports

Australia vs South Africa
Third Test, Day Five
Live at 5:00 am (Friday)



Nitol-Tata Fifth Nat'l Football League First Semifinal
Abahani vs Muktiyoddha (3:00 pm)
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium

Aktel Premier Div Cricket League
Old DOHS vs Biman
Venue: BKSP-2
Victoria vs Abahani
Venue: Fatullah Cricket Stadium
City Club vs Mohammedan
Venue: Bogra Dist Stadium
Agrani Bank vs Sonargaon Cricketers
Venue: BKSP-1
Indira Road vs Kalabagan
Venue: Comilla District Stadium
Brothers Union vs Orient SC
Venue: Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium



Shaven-headed Abahani and national captain Arif Khan Joy jogs along with his teammates at the club's Dhanmondi ground ahead of their high stake Nitol-Tata National League semifinal at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today.

Will Abahani be third time lucky?

Meet Muktiyoddha in first semi today

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani will look forward to reach their first final of the season when they take on an under-strength Muktiyoddha Sangsad in the first semifinal of the Nitol-Tata Fifth National Football League today.

The kick off time has been revised to 3pm instead of previously scheduled 4pm.

The second semifinal between holders Brothers Union and Mohammedan Sporting Club will be held tomorrow, also at 3pm. While Brothers eye their third silverware this season, Mohammedan would be fighting for pride as well as their first title in two years.

Former Bangladesh national coach George Kottan, now in charge of Muktiyoddha, said that

the best four teams have reached the semis and any prediction about the finalists would be difficult.

Although Abahani would be haunted by memories of two lost semifinals -- in the Independence Cup and the Federation Cup -- earlier in the season, they are pinning hopes on their recent form in the ongoing tournament.

The sky-blues, who picked up the tempo in the second leg of the Dhaka Premier League where they eventually finished third and continued their form, are undefeated in 17 matches and will be able to field their best eleven unlike their opposition.

Muktiyoddha, who won the season's curtain raiser Independence Cup and were runners-up in the Federation Cup, not only have Nigerian forward Jeremiah suspended but also miss injured Arman and Amin Rana, both out for at least two months.

On the other hand, Abahani's Ghanaian striker Ibrahim who returns to the squad after a two-match ban, will be paired with national team's Farhad. With a midfield featuring Cameroon's Ndem and Moroccan Egrir Mohammed beside Bangladesh internationals Joy and Ujjal, Abahani have already earned the respect of the opposition.

"Abahani are a very strong team but I wanted to play against them in the semis because they play good football. I mean fair football," the Reds' Austrian coach Kottan said.

"It is easier to play good football against a good team. The way I want my team to play, is possible if Abahani are the opponents," he added.

It was evident during Muktiyoddha's Super Six match against Bangladesh Army that they were trying to avoid holders Brothers

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Scrap Mini WC: India

Cricket

AFP, New Delhi

India is set to rock the cricket establishment when it tells the sport's governing body next week to abolish the Champions Trophy limited-overs tournament.

The event, organised by the International Cricket Council (ICC) every two years, was designed to raise funds for the promotion and development of the game world-wide.

India, which hosts the next edition in October-November this year, believes the tournament dilutes the importance of the four-yearly World Cup and causes huge financial losses to the host country.

"We will honour our commitment to organise the Champions Trophy this year but want the tournament to be taken off the calendar in future," an Indian

cricket board official told AFP on Wednesday.

"Since the ICC takes away a major part of the revenue, the tournament is a financial burden on the country which hosts it."

"We have been forced to put aside 30-35 days in the prime months of October and November for the Champions Trophy."

"We could have utilised the period to organise a Test and one-day series which would have gained us almost 70 to 80 million dollars."

"I think the ICC should organise just one main event, the World Cup, in an already overcrowded calendar."

India will raise the issue at the ICC's executive board meeting in Dubai on January 11 after consulting other major cricket powers like Australia, England and Pakistan, the official added.

The Champions Trophy is the brainchild of former Indian and ICC chief Jagmohan Dalmya, who

lost control of the Indian cricket board in November when his faction was voted out by political heavyweight Sharad Pawar.

The previous four editions of the Champions Trophy were hosted by Bangladesh (1998), Kenya (2000), Sri Lanka (2002) and England (2004).

The move to scrap the tournament comes amidst reports that India wants to maximise revenues from TV rights by organising more series against major nations like Australia, England and Pakistan over the next four years.

The new regime in the Indian board has already signed a sponsorship deal worth 70 million dollars with Air Sahara and netted another 43 million dollars by making Nike the official kit suppliers for the national team.

With the Indian TV rights also

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'I'm not Greg's puppet'

Cricket

AFP, New Delhi

India's cricket captain Rahul Dravid warmed up for the upcoming Pakistan tour by rebuffing suggestions that coach Greg Chappell runs the team by remote control.

Dravid, who leaves for Pakistan on Thursday on his first foreign tour as a full-fledged captain, said it was wrong to assume the former Australian great was a despot.

"I've not found him domineering at all," Dravid said in an interview in the inaugural issue of the CricInfo magazine which hits the stands on Thursday.

"Chappell has been more than willing to listen to my ideas and my thoughts and I get a very good say."

"At the end of the day I think he believes that a captain must get what he wants. In fact, in a lot of ways we do a lot of things in my way."

Dravid took over in October after his predecessor Sourav

Ganguly was sacked following a public row with the outspoken Chappell.

"Like anything, sometimes it



RAHUL DRAVID

takes a bit of time for people to understand what the other person is trying to do and achieve," said Dravid in defence of the coach.

"I think the guys have responded very well. I've really enjoyed it. In a

lot of ways he's trying to bring in some new thoughts, some new ideas. We have our opinions and sometimes we agree and sometimes we might disagree."

"At the end of the day he's done a really good job. He's trying to coach teams in a slightly different way. I think it's a good way."

Asked what kind of team he wanted under him, Dravid said: "Tough, competitive -- a team that is looking to improve and have some fun along the way."

"Not taking things too seriously as at the end of the day it is sport and we must have a lot of fun playing it and must play it hard."

Without naming anyone, Dravid also spelt out what kind of players he did not want in the side.

"You don't want people whose own insecurities, whose own problems and whose own fears drag everyone else down. That can be a big dampener in teams," he said.

"I want to say that at this level I

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Premier Cricket League's ninth round today

SPORTS REPORTER

After two nerve-wrecking wins, defending champions Old DOHS face another hurdle in the Aktel Premier Division Cricket League when they face Bangladesh Biman in the ninth round at BKSP today.

DOHS made narrow escapes against Mohammedan and Abahani in the previous matches to maintain an all-win record.

Mediocre Victoria Sporting Club are breathing under the neck of the holders with two points adrift and the two-time champions will meet fallen giants Abahani at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium.

Smarting from five defeats the Dhanmondi outfit flew in former Sri Lankan all-rounder Kumar Dharmasena to save their face as their first foreign recruit Pakistani international Shadab Kabir's performance has been pretty ordinary.

Another giants Mohammedan Sporting Club are billed for a tough fight as the Motijheel outfit play against runners-up City Club at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogra.

Mohammedan suffered a humiliating eight-wicket defeat against Biman in the previous round following a three-run loss to DOHS to slip to the fourth place securing ten points.

Fresh from a nine-wicket victory against Brothers, big-spending Sonargaon Cricketers meet Agrani Bank at BKSP while the match between Brothers Union and Orient Sporting Club will take place at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium and Indira Road face Kalabagan at the Comilla Stadium.

Asia Cup cricket in Pakistan in Sept 2007

REUTERS, Mumbai

The Asia Cup one-day tournament will be held in Pakistan in September 2007, president of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) Sharad Pawar said on Wednesday.

The six-team event was originally set to start after India's Test and one-day series in Pakistan early this year but was postponed due to India's busy schedule.

India return from Pakistan on February 19 and take on England in three Tests and seven one-dayers.

Pawar made the announcement in New Delhi after taking over as president of the Asian Cricket Council.

Defending champions Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, the United Arab Emirates and Oman will take part in the Asia Cup.

Div I cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Rupali Bank registered their sixth victory in the First Division Cricket League with a three-wicket win over Cricket Coaching School (CCS) at the Jagannath hall ground yesterday.

The bankers scored 159-7 in reply to CCS's 158 all out.

At the Dhaka University ground, Azad Sporting Club (130-6) beat Kathalbagan (126-10) by four wickets. This was fifth win for Azad.

Surjo Tarun won a tie-match against Eskaton Sabuj Sangha by virtue of better run-rate to register their fifth win in eleven matches. Batting first Surjo Tarun were bowled out for 203 in 48 overs and then dismissed Eskaton for same total in 50 overs.

Ganguly back amongst runs

REUTERS, Mumbai

Former India captain Sourav Ganguly scored a fluent half-century on Wednesday in a domestic match he was asked to play by selectors to prove his form for the Pakistan tour.

Ganguly top-scored with a fluent 59, including nine boundaries, for Bengal against Tamil Nadu in Kolkata on the second day of the Ranji Trophy championship match.

The 33-year-old left-hander has suffered a prolonged batting slump and annoyed national selectors by not heeding instructions to play in the previous round of the competition.

Ganguly has been the centre of controversy since being dropped from the team for the third Test against Sri Lanka but then recalled for this month's Pakistan tour.

On Tuesday, Ganguly, who took three wickets, was banned from bowling further in the first innings of the four-day match after receiving two warnings for running on the pitch.

India will play three Tests and five one-day matches in Pakistan. The first Test in Lahore begins on January 13.

Ponting takes away Proteas' initiative

Cricket

AFP, Sydney

Ricky Ponting marked his 100th Test with a majestic hundred and Adam Gilchrist providentially found his form as Australia fought back to concede a first-innings lead of just 92 in the third Test against South Africa on Wednesday.

Skipper Ponting became only the sixth player to score a century in his 100th Test with his 120. And his deputy Gilchrist rediscovered his scoring touch with a blazing 86 to shake the Sydney Test into life after days of cricket torpor.

Australia were dismissed for 359 after the last three wickets added 96, in reply to the South Africans' 451 for nine declared.

In the final over South Africa lost the wicket of AB de Villiers in the

evening gloom, leg before wicket to Brett Lee for one, to end the day on four for one, 96 ahead. Skipper Graeme Smith was not out three.

"We set ourselves a target to be 150 ahead. Obviously it was slightly disappointing. We might have let ourselves down in one or two instances," South African coach Mickey Arthurs said.

Ponting joined Colin Cowdrey (104), Gordon Greenidge (149), Inzamamul Haq (184), Javed Miandad (145) and Alec Stewart (105) with a ton in his 100th Test.

When the momentum in the Australian run chase slowed after three wickets fell for four runs, Gilchrist staged a display of batting pyrotechnics, damaging three bats in the process.

He shook off a run of poor scores to thrill the home crowd with 10 fours and two sixes, frustrating South African attempts to grab a

much bigger innings lead with two days remaining.

Gilchrist found willing allies in Brett Lee (17), Stuart MacGill (29) and Glenn McGrath (1) to prolong the Proteas' agony before he was caught by Mark Boucher off Andre Nel.

"Although we didn't get as many as we needed in that first innings, we put up a really good fight and it was good to see Gilly (Gilchrist) back in the runs and the tail chipping in around him and to get only 90 behind and take a late wicket tonight. It hasn't been a real bad day for us," Ponting said.

Australia began the day on a shaky 54-3 as South Africa pressed for victory to square the three-match series.

But Ponting put on 130 for the fourth wicket with Mike Hussey, raising his hundred off a misfield by Jacques Rudolph at mid-on.

Hussey went on to make 45 before he was caught off his glove and pad by Mark Boucher, giving debutant off-spinner Johan Botha his first Test wicket.

Umpire Aleem Dar controversially turned down a strident lbw appeal by Nel when Hussey was on nine and Australia on 102 for three. Television replays showed the ball pitched in line with the stumps and did not deviate.

Ponting was out just before tea, lbw to Jacques Kallis, after an innings lasting 174 balls with 12 fours and a six.

Wickets then began to fall. Nel dismissed Andrew Symonds (12) and Shane Warne (0) with consecutive deliveries to finish with 4-81 before Gilchrist stopped the rot.

The milestones tumbled for Ponting, who finished 2005 as leading Test scorer with 1,544 runs at 61.32 and this week supplanted Kallis as cricket's top-rated batsman.

He became Australia's third all-time leading scorer when he passed Mark Waugh's Test aggregate of 8,029 runs. The Aussie skipper now has Allan Border (11,174) and Steve Waugh (10,927) ahead of him.

Ponting, who has hit four centuries in his last six Tests this southern summer, had a big let-off on 95 when he survived a confident leg before wicket appeal off Charl Langeveldt which was turned down by Dar.

'Hawkey' technology had the ball hitting middle and leg stumps.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at stumps on the third day of the third and final Test between Australia and South Africa

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LEADING FROM THE FRONT: Australian skipper Ricky Ponting salutes the Sydney crowd after reaching his hundred against South Africa on the third day of the 3rd and final Test on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

ASIAN CUP QUALIFIERS

Bangladesh in Group F

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh have been drawn in Group F with Uzbekistan, Qatar and Hong Kong in the 2007 Asian Cup qualifiers.

The qualifying rounds will be played over nine months in home and away basis with Bangladesh travelling to a very cold Uzbekistan for their opening game against the group's top-seeded side on February 22.

The draw was held in Kuala Lumpur on Wednesday and Pakistan, who were eliminated after losing to Bangladesh in the pre-qualifiers, were included through the backdoors after Sri Lanka's last moment withdrawal.

Bangladesh, who also participate in the AFC Challenge Cup in March, will host Hong Kong on March 1,

meet Qatar away on August 16 and at home on September 6. Bangladesh host Uzbekistan on October 11 and round off the show with an away game against Hong Kong on November 15.

AFP adds: Defending champions Japan were pitted with fellow World Cup campaigners Saudi Arabia

while newcomers Australia face a tricky trio of West Asian nations.

Zico's men avoided South Korea and archrivals China, whom Japan beat 3-1 in a bad-tempered final in Beijing in 2004 -- overcoming a wave of intimidation dished out by Chinese fans bristling at Japan's wartime past.

Also in Japan's group are India and Yemen, with the top two going through to the finals from July 9-27, 2007, which will be co-hosted by Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia and Vietnam.

The co-hosting is a decision the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) footregrets.

"It is proving very difficult for us. We have to have four organising committees, four media centres and there are also financial considerations," AFC president Mohammed

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WOMEN'S ASIA CUP

Mithali ton gives India 2nd title

Cricket

AFP, Karachi

Skipper Mithali Raj hit a brilliant century to lead India to an overwhelming 97-run win against Sri Lanka and a second successive Asia Cup title here on Wednesday.

Mithali hit seven boundaries in an unbeaten 108 to anchor the defending champions to a fighting total of 269-4 in their allotted 50 overs and then restricted the Islanders to 172-9.

India beat Sri Lanka and hosts Pakistan twice each in the double

league event before reigning supreme in the final to defend successfully the Asia Cup title they won in Sri Lanka two years ago.

"It is a fantastic win for us. Although we proved stronger than Pakistan and Sri Lanka we were never complacent in the tournament, which helped us win," said Mithali, who hails from Hyderabad in India.

Mithali was involved in two innings-building partnerships, putting on 94 for the first wicket with Jaya Sharma (62) and 104 for the second wicket with Anjum Chopra (42).

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CCDM grants Eid vacation

SPORTS REPORTER

The Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolitan (CCDM) has rescheduled the ongoing Premier Cricket League following requests from club officials.

The players requested their respective clubs to rearrange the fixtures to allow them enjoy the Eid with their families.

The tenth round will now take place on January 8 and the eleventh and final round will be held on January 16 instead of January 9.

As per domestic calendar, the fourth round of the National Cricket League was scheduled to start after completion of the Premier League's first round but the board has decided to continue the Premier League with Super-Six round starting from January 20.

The National League will resume after February 20.