

## Divine blessings for Mohammedan

### Blank Abahani 2-0 to lift National League crown

SPORTS REPORTER



Mohammedan Sporting Club became the first team to lift the National League trophy for a second time when the Black and Whites blanked archrivals Abahani 2-0 in the final of the Nitol-Tata Fifth National Football League yesterday.

Skipper Alfaz Ahmed set the first goal for Divine Chibiuka in the 48th minute before scoring the second at the stroke of the final whistle as Mohammedan not only regained the title after two seasons but also booked a place in Asia's club competition AFC Cup.

About 25,000 fans gathered at the Bangabandhu National Stadium to see the first final between the country's most celebrated teams in three years but under pressure to produce a title following seasons of failure, both the sides began shakily.

And it was the in-form Abahani, unbeaten for 18 matches, who showed their nerves at the back. Centre-backs Pradeep and Marshall fumbled time and again under constant Mohammedan onslaught and goalkeeper Nizam had to rush and handle the ball out of his area in the 14th minute to stop an attack.

Just like the sky-blues, who did not get their semifinal hero Abdullah Parvez -- suspended for two bookings -- in the lineup, Mohammedan were without key midfielder Emeka, the injured Nigerian who slotted their all-important goal in the semifinal against Brothers Union.

But Mohammedan made up for Emeka's absence by packing their midfield with five matured men, who effectively neutralised Abahani playmakers Ndem and Egir Mohammed and launched quick counter attacks to kill the game. However, the champions -- who also maintained a tight defence -- were fortunate as referee Mansoor Azad ignored a series of fouls including an appeal for pen-

alty when Abahani striker Farhad was tripped inside the box by Nazrul ten minutes before halftime.

The first real chance fell to Egir but the Moroccan's weak header on a centre by Farhad went straight to goalkeeper Biplab in the 17th minute.

Two minutes later, Nizam tipped over a dangerously dipping Alfaz cross out of his goal before midfielder Divine shot Munna's perfect centre just over from close.

Abahani should have taken the lead on the half-hour but Ndem, adjudged player of the tournament, rattled the sidebar after being picked by Egir's overhead pass.

Abahani substituted half-fit fullback Wali Faisal at the break and his replacement Lajuk's gaffe gave away Alfaz open space at the right three minutes into the second half. The veteran national striker chipped the ball near from the corner-flag and man-of-the-match Divine leaped in the air to shrug off challenges from Obaidur and Pradeep to nod home.

While all the foreign recruits had an off-day, Egir kept Abahani alive but his spectacular sidevolley on a centre by Obaidur was parried for a corner by an equally brilliant Biplab at the Mohammedan goal.

Two minutes later, the sky-blue booters appeared in vain again as Mohammedan defender Rezaul handled the ball inside the box while trying to clear a cross by Egir.

The last 15 minutes belonged to Mohammedan when they split the rival defence with aerial passes but Francis, chasing a high ball by Arman Aziz, failed to beat Nizam on one-on-one in the 88th minute.

The Abahani keeper once again pulled off a superb save, denying Nigerian striker Francis's shot from top-of-the-box after Hassan set him up with a long ball. However, the partial clearance was not enough as an onrushing Alfaz tapped the ball into an open net to spark wild celebrations seconds on the stroke of the final whistle.

For Mohammedan, whose first



## 'Abahani harshly treated'

SPORTS REPORTER



Blaming the referee after defeats is nothing new in domestic football. And the Abahani officials were no exception after suffering a 2-0 loss to Mohammedan Sporting Club in yesterday's National Football League final at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

But the sky-blues were complaining about off-the-field events too.

The whole team were kept waiting at the stadium entrance for half an hour by the security forces and Abahani manager Satyajit Das Rupu complained that it was 'intentional'.

"Everybody has seen what happened today. A quarter tried to create pressure upon us from the beginning and we were intentionally delayed at the gate," an angry Rupu said after the final.

"Mohammedan players were not even checked but we were treated by the security officials like unwanted guests," he added.

There were also allegations that a member of the security force at the gate held one Abahani player at gunpoint.

But in the end, no one remembers the losers.

Mohammedan, under coach Shaful Islam Manik who took charge ahead of the National League after change of three sets of coaches, guided his boys well.

He used his limited resources to

handcuff the in-form Abahani attacks and snatch victory despite starting the final as underdogs.

"I know Abahani were a better team and unbeaten in the run. My target was to destroy their midfield build-ups. My players successfully implemented my plans," said Manik, whose side took revenge of their 1-0 loss to Abahani in the National League group phase.

"Luck was also on our side. They hit woodwork in the first half. Otherwise things could have been different. Our players also utilised the chances they got," said Manik, who dedicated the triumph to his father whose fourth anniversary of death is today.

Mohammedan captain Alfaz, who set up one goal for Divine and



MISSION ACCOMPLISHED: (clockwise) Abahani custodian Nizam Mazumdar at full stretch to foil an attack by Mohammedan stiker Divine Chibiuka. Teammates converge to congratulate Alfaz who has just scored the second goal. Players and officials of Mohammedan on the winners' podium with the National Football League trophy.

## A biennial Indo-Pak series

BBC ONLINE, undated

Pakistan and India have agreed to play each other in just one series every two years, rather than the current annual arrangement after fears of overkill.

The sides are preparing for their third full series since April 2004.

"We have taken this decision and will present it at the International Cricket Council meeting," said Pakistan Cricket Board chairman Shaharyar Khan.

"We don't see the ICC having any problems with accommodating this new schedule in the tours programme."

Khan said both boards agreed the sides should avoid playing too much cricket against each other and the new agreement is line with the Ashes schedule between

SEE PAGE 13 COL 5



Bob Woolmer

(Pakistan cricket coach)

"I always say that yesterday is history and today is a mystery. We can win any series if we play well."



ESPN Sportscentre Live at 8:30 pm

## Victoria end DOHS run

SPORTS REPORTER



Victoria Sporting Club finally put an end to Old DOHS' nine-match winning streak in the Aktel Premier Division Cricket League when they handed the holders a 19-run defeat in the tenth round game at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium yesterday.

A six-wicket haul by pacer Shahnewaz Kabir powered Victoria to bring high-flying DOHS down to the earth after the runaway leaders looked well set to complete the first phase with their unbeaten record intact.

Star-studded DOHS, set to chase a demanding 251 for win, were bundled out for 231 in a curtailed 45-overs a-side match.

The victory took second-placed Victoria within two points of DOHS, who still are at the top with 18 points with one more match of the first phase to go.

Elsewhere, matches were also curtailed due to foggy weather across the country. There were also contrasting fortunes for country's two most popular clubs.

When Mohammedan confirmed their Super-Six berth with a 12-run victory against Kalabagan increasing their tally to 14 points, their perennial foes Abahani suf-

fered a five-run defeat against Sonargaon Cricketers in Bogra only to bury their hopes for a passage in the Super-Six.

Big-spending Sonargaon brightened their chances to advance to the Super-Six with 12 points as they shared the fourth position along with runners-up City Club and Bangladesh Biman.

City recorded a six-wicket victory against Biman at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium to stay alive while Brothers Union stumbled to a five-wicket loss to rank-outsiders Indira Road at BKSPT to remain glued to 10 points.

With DOHS, Victoria and Mohammedan already confirming their Super-Six berths, the remaining three slots would be decided after the Eid holidays when the 12 teams return to play their final game of the first phase on January 16.

At the moment City, Biman and Sonargaon look set to complete the Super-Six quorum and the trio would be there even in case of defeat provided that Mohammed-dan beat Brothers in the final round.

In the other match at the Comilla Stadium, no-hopers Agrani Bank registered their third victory when they beat pointless Orient Sporting Club by seven wickets.

VICTORIA-DOHS

Despite their impressive record of winning matches by batting first, DOHS skipper Akram Khan decided to field to exploit the early

overcast condition but it eventually backfired.

Victoria thrived on a 73-run second wicket partnership between Golan Mabud (50) and Nasiruddin Faruque (34 not out before being retired hurt) to lay the foundation before their Pakistani batsman Jaffar Qureshi took the game away from the holders with a 44-ball 61.

The giant left-hander smashed six sixes including three in one prodigious over of left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak and two fours in his hurricane innings.

The national Under-19 captain Mushfiqur Rahim scored a vital 32 off 46 balls.

DOHS, chasing a target for a second time in the league, lost wickets at regular intervals in the face of some controlled bowling from Shahnewaz, who ripped through the top-order to finish with 6-47.

DOHS' inform Kenyan batsman Steve Tikolo with six 50s in nine games failed for a change. Tikolo was brilliantly caught by Jaffar at mid-off after scoring only seven.

Skipper Akram Khan (32) and Mohammed Shahin (59 off 84 balls) tried to play catch up cricket but collapsed against an ever-increasing run-rate.

Manjarul Islam top scored with 61 but got little support from the

SEE PAGE 13 COL 6

## Joy smells rat

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani skipper Arif Khan Joy alleged yesterday after his side's loss to Mohammedan Sporting Club in the National Football League final that their foreign booters were involved in match-fixing.

"Our foreign booters were bribed to throw away the match. Felix Chinawoku, who plays for Brothers Union, was the courier," said the national captain.

"Their today's low-key performance is a proof of that," added Joy.

However, Abahani's Moroccan midfielder Egir Mohammed denied the allegations.

"People has seen how we played today. I think Joy is trying to make us scapegoats for his failure. He has not played well," said Egir pointing a finger at the sky-blues captain.

## Div I cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Boys registered a comfortable 64-run victory over Young Pegasus-B in the First Division Cricket League at the Dhaka University ground yesterday.

It was the sixth win for Boys in 12 matches while Pegasus-B suffered their ninth defeat in same number of outings.

Bangladesh Boys rode on two half-centuries by Mamun (58) and Monwar (50) to amass 288 all out in 50 overs.

In reply, Pegasus-B were all out for 224 in 45.3 overs with Antu making the team highest 71.

## Tennis team off to Myanmar today

SPORTS REPORTER

A five-member Bangladesh junior tennis team leaves Dhaka today to take part in the Under-14 Asian Championship Group-2 competition in Myanmar to be held on January 11-16.

The players are: Omar Faruque Sunny, Rezwan Ahsan, Sadia Hossain, Mehjabin Mahub and Arif Hossain.

Rokonuddin Ahmed will accompany the team as coach.

Players will also take part in a training camp during the tour under the supervision of development officer of Asia Zone Suresh Menon.

## Farhat fires for Pakistan A



AFP, Lahore

Left-handed opener Imran Farhat hit a brilliant century against India on Sunday after the tourists declared their first innings closed at a mammoth 414-7.

The 23-year-old Farhat scored 107 to help Pakistan A reach 212-4 at close on the second day of the three-day tour match at the Bagh-e-Jinnah ground.

Pakistan's two other Test players Faisal Iqbal (13) and Asim Kamal (four) were at the crease at close when bad light stopped play eight overs before the scheduled end of play.

Farhat, who played the last of his 15 Tests in Australia in December 2004, led a home team recovery with a solid 160-run stand for the third wicket with skipper Hasan Raza who made a 62-ball 75.

Farhat saw his opening partner Bazid Khan and Mohammad Waseem fall with the home team score at 26, but he kept his composure to blunt a combined pace and spin Indian attack.

He got a reprieve at 95, when Yuvraj Singh put him down at mid-wicket off paceman Irfan Pathan, before hitting off-spinner Harbhajan Singh for a couple to reach the three-figure mark off 143 balls with 16 boundaries.

He hit Harbhajan for a six before falling to the same bowler in the next over.

Raza too played some well-timed shots during his breezy knock, flicking Pathan for a six to add to his eleven fours.

Ajit Agarkar provided the tourists with the initial breakthrough when he forced an edge off Bazid before Pathan trapped another Test discard Waseem leg-before in the ninth over.

The tourists resumed at 298-4 and called Venkatesai Laxman (54) and Yuvraj Singh (59) back in the pavilion with declarations after both had good stints with the bat.

Wicketkeeper Mahendra Dhoni hit five boundaries in his rapid 22 before India declared their innings at lunch.

### SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard on the second day of the three-day match between India and Pakistan A at the Bagh-e-Jinnah ground in Lahore on Sunday:

INDIA: First innings (overnight 298 for 4)

Gambhir c Iftikhar b Irshad	53
Jaffer c Haider b Gul	58
Dravid c Raza b Farhat	63
Tendulkar c Haider b Arfat	74
Laxman retired	54
Yuvraj retired	59
Dhoni c s b Irshad	22
Pathan not out	8

Pathan	13	3	61	2
Agarkar	9	2	28	1
Rudra	6	0	33	0
Zaheer	7	0	43	0
Harbhajan	13	1	44	1

Extras: (lb-3, nb-3) 6  
Total: (For 4 wickets in 48 overs) 212

To bat: Iftikhar Anjum, Zulqarnain Haider, Mohammad Irshad, Mansoor Aamjad, Umar Gul, Yasir Arafat.

Agarkar not out 4

Extras: (b-5, lb-4, nb-10) 19

Total: (For 7 wickets dec, 104 overs) 414

Did not bat: RP Singh, Zaheer Khan, Harbhajan Singh.

Fall of wickets: 1-81, 2-153, 3-220, 4-279, 5-357, 6-390, 7-402.

Bowler	O	M	R	W
Gul	19	3	58	1
Anjum	15	3	62	0
Arafat	2	43	83	1
Irshad	19	2	79	2
Farhat	8	0	36	1
Amjad	19	1	87	0

PAKISTAN A: First innings

Farhat c Zaheer b Harbhajan 107

Bazid c Laxman b Agarkar 6

Waseem lbw b Pathan 1

Raza c Dhoni b Pathan 75

Iqbal not out 13

Kamal not out 4

Extras: (lb-3, nb-3) 6

Total: (For 4 wickets in 48 overs) 212

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Pakistan A's Imran Farhat follows through after hitting the ball to mid-wicket on the second day of the three-day match against India at the Bagh-e-Jinnah stadium in Lahore on Sunday.

## 'I'd quit cricket for my kids'



REUTERS, Melbourne

Leading Test wicket taker Shane Warne has said he would quit cricket altogether if his three children become affected by his pending divorce from wife Simone.

"If they start to get affected then everything will stop," Warne told News Limited newspapers in Australia on Sunday. "I'd have to stop everything."

"With everything you do, unfortunately there are some sacrifices you have to make."

"For me, playing international cricket for Australia and doing the best I can for a long period of time, my kids are the ones who miss out on some dad time."

"It's not to say they don't get

time -- they get a lot and I've had a lot of impact on them growing up."

Warne separated from his wife last July after sex allegations in British tabloid newspapers.

Simone Warne, in a recent interview with a women's magazine, said the marriage was over and she was going ahead with divorce proceedings.

The 36-year-old Warne said he would now spend time with his children before Australia's tour of South Africa in March.

He will then travel to Britain, where he will play for Hampshire in the English county competition.

Warne, who has 659 Test wickets, refused to put a timeline on when he would retire because he was enjoying his cricket.

"I'm enjoying the guys and I'm enjoying the way we play."

"How much longer I'll play, who knows? I think it's all about enjoyment, and the last couple of years have probably been the best I've had."

"Once the enjoyment goes, it will be time for me to go -- at present I'm enjoying cricket."



SHANE WARNE