

Bangladesh get the nod as sole hosts

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh will be the sole host of the AFC Challenge Cup 2006, which kicks off on April 1. The 16-team meet was originally scheduled to be held in Bangladesh and Nepal but the Himalayan Kingdom was dumped due to current political unrest, it was decided at a meeting of the AFC Challenge Cup and AFC President Cup organising committee on Tuesday at the AFC House in Kuala Lumpur.

The AFC Challenge Cup, which provides an international competition platform for teams from the emerging and developing countries, will be played at the Bangabandhu National Stadium in Dhaka and the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong.

The dates of the inaugural edition of the AFC Challenge Cup were also amended from March 25 to April 7 2006 to April 1-16 in order not to clash with the Independence Day activities in Bangladesh.

However, the schedule will collide with world champion Australia's cricket tour of Bangladesh. Australia arrive in Dhaka on April 6 and depart on April 29.

THE TEAMS

GROUP A: India, Taiwan, Philippines, Afghanistan.

GROUP B: Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Brunei.

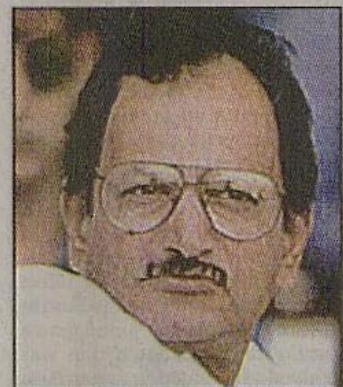
GROUP C: Palestine, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Guam.

GROUP D: Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Macau.



Did U Know?

Yuvraj Singh scored 107 not out from 83 balls in the fifth and final ODI against Pakistan on the February 19, 2006. It was his sixth century, first against Pakistan.



Ajit Wadekar

(Former India cricket captain)
"There is no harm in (Sourav) Ganguly being included in the side but I suppose the time has come for him to end his career. The Aussies told Steve Waugh when it was time for him to step down."



ESPN
Sportscentre
Live at 8:30 pm
UEFA Champions League
Chelsea vs Barcelona
Live at 1:30 am (Thursday)

STAR Sports
Bangladesh vs Sri Lanka
2nd ODI
Live at 8:45 am
UEFA Champions League
Chelsea vs Barcelona
Live at 1:30 am (Thursday)



Bangladesh vs Sri Lanka
2nd ODI
Venue: Shaheed Chandu Stadium, Bogra



REMEMBERING 'EM IN A DIFFERENT WAY: Bangladesh cricketers with their heads draped in national red and green colours train at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium on February 21, the Language Movement Martyrs Day.

Mahela warns Tigers

SPORTS REPORTER from Bogra



Why Bangladesh played so badly against Sri Lanka in the first one-day international is a million-dollar question.

If asked to any Bangladeshi player or official, one would get a simple answer that the players could not perform as per their potential.

But Sri Lanka captain Mahela Jayawardene's explanation on Tuesday was different.

"Sri Lanka never take any team lightly, especially when we play against teams like Bangladesh and Zimbabwe, we always try to be more careful. Because we know that complacency can make an upset," said the 28-year old

Jayawardene during his side's practice session at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium.

"Our young players are very much aware about that. We take Bangladesh and Australia in same way. That is why you have to perform your best to do something different against us," added the soft-spoken skipper.

He smilingly agreed that they learnt the lesson from their defeat against lowly Kenya during the 2003 World Cup in South Africa.

The visiting captain also warned that some of their top batsmen including himself are eagerly waiting to make up for their disappointing batting in the first match.

"Yes, we had a comprehensive victory yesterday but we are very much focused on the second game. We will make sure that we play good cricket and you know that some

batsmen like Sanath (Jayasuriya) didn't bat well in the first match. We know what Bangladesh offered in the second innings, so there is hardly any chance to think about another easy sail.

"Despite an easy victory we had a very good session here. We needed this to get accustomed with the condition. So you can understand that we are not taking Bangladesh lightly," he added.

Replying to a question, Sri Lanka skipper said that he could not understand what kind of strategy Bangladesh adopted against them in the first match.

"They might have tried to put pressure on us playing some wild shots but I don't know what they actually wanted to do. Definitely my bowlers were disciplined. They bowled with a big heart and they bowled in the right area," he added.

'Excuse not acceptable'

SPORTS REPORTER from Bogra

Everybody hoped that Mohammad Ashraful will bounce back from his poor form in the home series against Sri Lanka, but the way he was dismissed in the first game against Sri Lanka on Monday frustrated everybody.

Ashraful chased a wide-delivery off pacer Farveez Maharoof only to reach in the safe hands of wicketkeeper Kumar Sangakkara after making only four runs.

"I think I unnecessarily took pressure on me and that's why I failed. I don't know why it happens time and again. I chased a bad ball yesterday. I am trying to overcome the problem," said Ashraful, a veteran of 60 ODIs and 29 Tests, adding that he was hopeful about a comeback in the second match.

Chief selector Faruque Ahmed, however, was not ready to accept the excuse. Rather he was surprised by the attitude of the young players in the team.

"Any player who at least has played international cricket for two years can't say that he can't handle the pressure. Fine, you might be able to play all the shots, but that doesn't mean you chase every ball. You should handle the pressure in the highest level otherwise you have to bow out of the stage," said a frustrated Faruque.

Another talented batsman Aftab Ahmed got a good start in the game but the way he danced down the wicket aiming a big shot frustrated everybody.

"Everybody told during the team meeting that they will not make the same mistake, but they just forget everything when they go out in the middle. It was unacceptable the way some batsmen threw their wickets," said the former Bangladesh captain.

Bangladesh play Uzbekistan today

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will begin their 2007 Asian Cup qualifying campaign against the fancied Uzbekistan in the Group F opener at Tashkent today.

Diego Cruciani's charges will not only face a difficult task playing against the eighth-ranked team in Asia but also the central Asian winter.

The match will start at 4pm local time (5pm Bangladesh time) at the Uzbek capital with the temperature around two degrees (Celsius).

Argentine coach Cruciani, who had told before their departure that the team would go into the game with a defensive ploy, however, will have to watch the game from the gallery due to his two-match provisional suspension slapped by the Asian Football Confederation.

Cruciani is banned for at least two internationals for his attempt to assault Indian referee Reaz Ul Haque during Bangladesh's pre-qualifying home match against Pakistan in December last year.

Bangladesh will play their second match against Hong Kong at home on March 1. The other team in the group are Qatar.

Bashar & co looking for an answer

Javed & Nazmul in

BISHWAJIT ROY from Bogra



The bewildered Tigers were seeking an answer during their training session on Tuesday morning at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium why their top order repeatedly made the same mistakes.

Habibul Bashar's men used national flags as headbands during the practice and decided to offer floral wreaths at the local Shaheed Minar later to observe Amar Ekushey and the International Mother Language Day besides taking some inspiration from the spirit of language movement.

The home skipper, however, was very much aware with the fact that there was no alternative to scoring runs to come back in the series in today's second game of the three-match series.

Bangladesh have made yet another devastating start against Sri Lanka after being booked for 118 runs on Monday to suffer a five-wicket defeat in a lopsided affair which not only frustrated the crowd in the northern town but

also the whole nation.

The home-side think-tank's only desire ahead of the second game was to ensure minimum damage in the first ten overs to be competitive against the islanders.

"We have decided to offer floral wreaths at the Shaheed Minar and it could be an inspiration for us. But you know the only solution for us is the top order do their duty properly," said Bangladesh captain Bashar.

"We had a long team meeting last night after a disappointing batting performance. We make the same mistakes time and again but don't understand why. Actually we were shot out from the match in the first ten overs because we lost too many wickets. Now our only target is to keep wickets intact at least in the first ten overs," said Bashar, also under pressure following a long bad patch in the shorter version of the game.

Coach Dav Whatmore also hinted at a change in strategy.

"We would like to make a change in our strategy but only in the implementation. I want more careful batting from the top-order and I have told the boys not to lose too many wickets in the early

stage," said dejected Whatmore.

"We need to be more competitive and put pressure on the opponents by putting on a reasonable total on the board," said the Australian.

Bashar believed that the inclusion of opener Javed Omar will help the team in a bid to not lose too many wickets early.

"Javed will open the innings with Shahriar Nafees which I think will be helpful for us. There is also a chance to see Alok Kapali batting at number seven instead of nine. We also dropped one left-arm spinner (Abdur Razzak) to strengthen the batting order. I am hopeful to write a different story tomorrow," said Bashar.

Replying to a question, Bashar said that he was demoted to the batting order as he thought Aftab Ahmed and Mohammad Ashraful were more capable of playing over-the-top during the fielding restriction.

"Yes, I was successful at number three but I still believe that Aftab and Ashraful are better than me to use the fielding restrictions because they can naturally play over the top," he explained.



AFTER YOU SIR: Sri Lankan coach Tom Moody (R) leads his charges out of the team hotel at Bogra on Tuesday.

Inzy rates Dhoni highly

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Inzamamul Haq, the Pakistan captain, on Tuesday described Mahendra Singh Dhoni's batting as "murderous" and reckoned that he was a player to be watched out for in the 2007 World Cup.

The Indian wicketkeeper-batsman scored 219 runs in four innings at a stupendous strike rate of 137 in the just-concluded five-match ODI series, propelling him to number three in the latest ICC rankings among ODI batsmen.

"He is (also) safe behind the wickets and can be compared with Adam Gilchrist though the Australian has proved himself as the best after years in commission," Inzamam told PTI at Lahore.

Despite the 4-1 loss to India, Inzamam believed that the Pakistan team has greatly improved over the past two years. "When India came here in 2004, our boys were young and inexperienced. They have since played a lot of cricket in other countries that has given them experience and confidence," he said.

He said that the atmosphere in the Pakistani dressing room too had definitely improved. "When you have confidence the atmosphere in the dressing room also improves," he added.

On venting frustrations in the field, he said, "I control my anger. If someone drops a catch and I get angry, will that catch come back to us? It won't. Therefore it is better to be cool because that helps in better performance."

Looking back on the series, Inzamam said that India's batting was undoubtedly their strength. On Suresh Raina, he said: "I did not get a chance to see him because the Indian top order did not let the pressure come on to Raina and the later batsmen. But I always believe that only the best players are picked to represent their countries and therefore Raina must be a good cricketer who will improve with every game. But consistency is the key and it applies to both, Raina as well as the selectors."

He felt Irfan Pathan was fast blossoming into the all-rounder

five best batsmen in the world along with Rahul Dravid, Ricky Ponting, Jacques Kallis and Brian Lara. On his own place in the pecking order -- with an average of nearly 52 after 107 Tests and about 40 in 356 ODIs -- he shrugged it off with a typically nonchalant, "Oh, Inzamam comes way behind them."

Yuvraj to miss first Eng Test

REUTERS, New Delhi



MAHENDRA SINGH DHONI

India batsman Yuvraj Singh has been ruled out of next week's first Test against England because of a hamstring injury, secretary of the Board of Control for Cricket in India Niranjan Shah said on Tuesday.

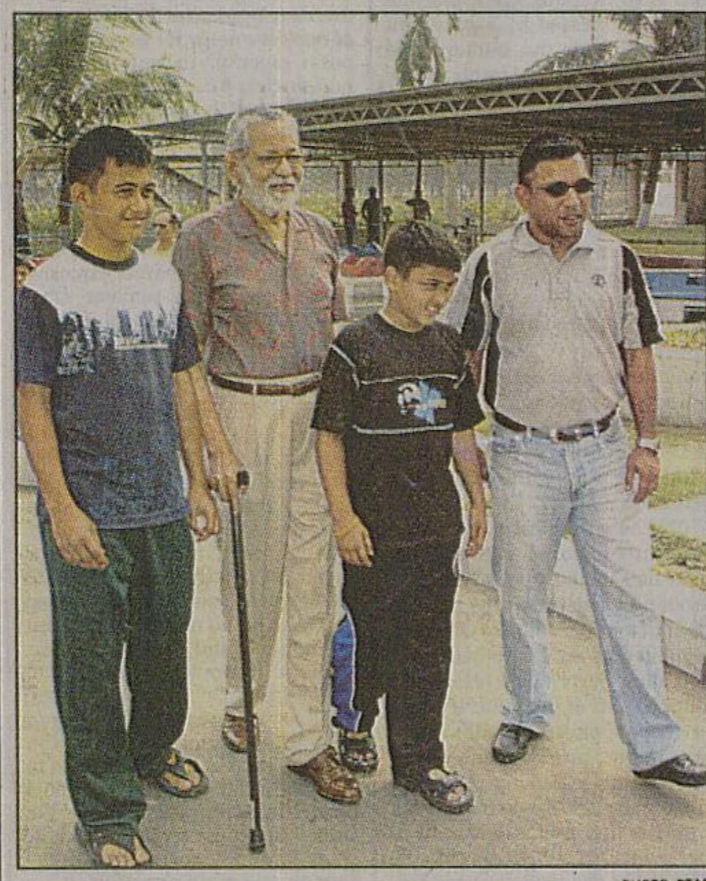
The in-form left-hander suffered the injury on Sunday while scoring a match-winning 107 not out in the final one-dayer against Pakistan in Karachi.

Yuvraj, 24, has become an integral member of both the Test and one-day teams. The first Test starts on March 1 in Nagpur.

Opening batsman Virender Sehwag, who returned home midway through the one-day series in Pakistan due to a shoulder injury, is undergoing treatment and his availability for the first Test is expected to be known in a day.

"The physio has given him some injections. We will be waiting until tomorrow," Shah told reporters.

Off-spinner Harbhajan Singh, who missed the one-day series in Pakistan due to a finger injury, is fit and will be available for selection when the team for the first Test is selected on Thursday.



GENERATIONS UNITED: Khaled Mahmud (R) walks out of the team hotel in Bogra with his two sons and father on Tuesday. The experienced all-rounder signed off from international cricket after the first one-day match against Sri Lanka here on Monday.