

AUS-BD SERIES GP becomes title sponsors

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) confirmed yesterday Grameen Phone as the title sponsors for the upcoming home series against Australia.

The announcement settled speculations after two mobile operators battled for the position of the title sponsors.

BCB is going to receive a record amount of money from the sponsorship deal.

Australians not coming

SPORTS REPORTER

When one receives a message that your opponents have cancelled their trip, being shocked is an understatement. Be it a cricket fan or the captain of the Test team, cancellation of Australia's upcoming tour must be a big disappointment.

Thankfully, someone was just trying to pull Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar's legs. Apparently, it was an April Fool's Day joke!

The rumour that the Aussies are not coming had spread like wild fire in the sports arena from the very beginning of the day. Everyone called the officials concerned to confirm if this 'breaking news' had any truth.

In the end, sanity prevailed and yes, the Australians will be coming to town on schedule.



Alfah Ahmed (L) celebrates his goal with teammate Abul during their AFC Challenge Cup first round match against Cambodia at the Bangabandhu National Stadium on Saturday.

Cruciani not very happy

SPORTS REPORTER

Despite tasting their first home win in three years, Bangladesh coach Diego Cruciani was unhappy following the hosts' 2-1 victory over Cambodia on Saturday in the AFC Challenge Cup Group C match.

"The ball control and distribution was not up to the mark. The new defence also played badly," said the Argentine who however praised his forwards. "They have used the chances. That's a good sign."

"The backline was nervous and was under pressure in the dying moments. We have used five new players in this match and you could expect that. I'll talk with them about the mistakes before our next match against Guam," said Cruciani.

Cambodia coach Jo Yong Chol said that the fitness level and skill of the Bangladeshi players were better. "That made the difference. We are here to gain experience and the home side were not a weak team by any means."

"As our first match, I am happy with the boys," Chol added.

A teams share honours

SPORTS REPORTER

The second Test between Bangladesh A and Sri Lanka A petered into a tame draw at Bogra's Shaheed Chandu Stadium yesterday.

The two-match Test series between the two second string sides ended in a 0-0 deadlock after the first Test at BKSP also finished in a tame draw.

Bangladesh A were left to chase an improbable 328 runs in a single session of the final day and predictably, played it safe. But there were early hiccups as the home team were reduced to 32 for 4. Nafis Iqbal and Jamaluddin saw off the remaining 20 overs with a sedate 55 runs unbeaten stand. National opener Iqbal scored a patient 26, while Jamaluddin was on 30, when stumps were drawn.

Earlier, Sri Lanka A declared their second innings at 229 for 9. Mendis and Warnapura led the recovery with a 77-run fourth wicket partnership. Gajanyake scored a patient 59 off 142 balls, with six 4s. Tapash Baisya and Mehrab Jr. took two wickets each for Bangladesh A.

Bogra hosts the first one-day match between the two sides on April 4, while the remaining two one-day matches will be played in Khulna on April 6 and 8.

SCORES IN BRIEF
SRI LANKA A: 466 & 229 for 9 dec. in 77.3 overs (Mendis 38, Warnapura 42, Gajanyake 59, Silva 35; Baisya 2/20, Mehrab 2/29).
BANGLADESH A: 368 and 87 for 4 in 31 overs (Iqbal 26, Jamaluddin 30*; Jayaweera 1/19).

Hear it from Blatter

Football

BY QAZI ZULQUARNAIN ISLAM

FIFA president Sepp Blatter shuttled into Dhaka yesterday morning and left behind, among other things, a significant message for the sports minister of the country asking him to build a football academy so that people remember him forever even if he was not in his current position.

"If your tenure ends after six months why don't you build a football academy so people will know you," remarked Blatter humorously after State Minister for Youth and Sports Fazlur Rahman, sitting beside him during a crowded press conference, informed the FIFA supremo that he would be quitting before the next general elections.

Blatter, who arrived in the city to inaugurate the AFC Challenge Cup and hand over funds for tsunami victims, also appealed all to embrace 'the beautiful game' not just as a sport but also as a means of education and life.

The FIFA boss was really moved by the way he was welcomed in a country he has never visited before.

"In all my travels I have never yet been received in a carpet of flowers like today," said a smiling Blatter who disclosed that many a time he had flown over Bangladesh.

"I asked my pilot to let me drop into Bangladesh by parachute many

times but he was not so willing," joked the head of FIFA.

During a lively encounter with the reporters at the BFF Bhaban he also spoke about everything from financing the development of football in the region to predicting the World Champions.

A visibly glowing Blatter was dazzling in the press conference as he spoke with élan improvising with witticisms.

Blatter immediately endeared himself to the journalist by pronouncing himself one of them, as he is still a member of AIPS.

"Some time ago I was in that seat asking questions to some important person," said the football supremo.

He soon moved on to more serious matters declaring FIFA's financial intentions for the next four-year term, details of which would be available after a financial press conference in Zurich next week. He however said that due to the next World Cup being held in South Africa "more money would be available" for the developing countries in the region of South Asia. "It is now up to the associations to move and show their initiative," said Blatter.

When queried about how FIFA expected football to win the popularity battle in Bangladesh and the sub-continent, Blatter replied: "cricket cannot emulate the joy of football."

But as far as countering the popularity of the game is concerned it was something the local federa-

Dav wants minimum mistakes

Cricket

BISHWAJIT ROY

Dav Whatmore prefers to get going when the going gets tough. The Bangladesh coach opted to stay in the background when the Tigers bludgeoned their way to a 4-0 one-day whitewash against Kenya at home last month.

But with the biggest home challenge of his charges against the might of the Australians just a few days away Whatmore have not only decided to break the silence but also inject an air of confidence into his boys for what will be his second acid test against the world champions.

Interestingly enough, Whatmore's first assignment was the tour down under when he took over in June 2003.

And after considerable ups and downs during this period, the Sri Lanka-born Australian coach

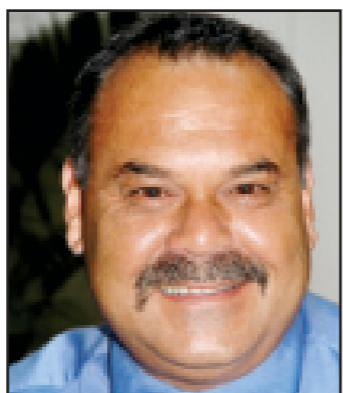
believes that he has some successes to make him feel comfortable ahead of his second assignment against the Aussies.

"It was not only Bangladesh's first tour to Australia but also the first trip for me with the team. There is a huge difference between the Bangladesh team which toured Australia in 2003 and which will face them now," said Whatmore during first day's practice at the Mirpur indoor facilities.

"We are in a much better position than we were then and there have been enormous changes not only in the team but among the players. They have had the experience of facing many good players and teams in the corresponding time, which was not the case when we first met. So, 'scared' is not a word to think about in this tour," he added.

"There is also another significant factor working in our favour that is Glenn McGrath will be missing from the tour. While McGrath and Shane

Warne have more than one thousand wickets between them, his absence might prove to be beneficial for our players. Saying that I am not ignoring their other bowlers, they are equally dangerous and it will not be an easy task to handle them," said Whatmore.



DAV WHATMORE

The 51-year-old Bangladesh coach made a bold statement when asked whether it would be possible for his team to maintain their recent home record of winning at least one one-day game.

"Absolutely, absolutely possible. Our main objective is to play as hard as we can against any opposition and we will definitely try to pinch a game during the tour. But we have to reduce our mistakes because you can't afford even a small mistake against a team like Australia," said a confident Whatmore.

The Australian had told soon after joining that his biggest challenge laid in trying to change the defeatist attitude of the team. Now after a one-day and Test series triumph against Zimbabwe and some brilliant one-day victories against India, Australia, Sri Lanka and recently a 4-0 success against minnows Kenya, he believes that his efforts did not go in vain at all.

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Performers showcasing rituals of rural Bangladesh at the opening ceremony of the AFC Challenge Cup at the Bangabandhu National Stadium on Saturday.



Did U Know?

Joseph S Blatter's visit to Bangladesh this year marks only the second time that a FIFA president has come to the country. The only previous occurrence was when preceeding president Joao Havelange made a visit in 1982.

What to WATCH

- BTV**
- AFC Challenge Cup Sri Lanka vs Brunei Live at 3:30 pm
 - Kyrgyzstan vs Pakistan Live at 6:00 pm
- BTV World**
- AFC Challenge Cup Tajikistan vs Macau Live at 3:30 pm
 - Nepal vs Bhutan Live at 6:00 pm
- ESPN**
- South Africa vs Australia 3rd Test, Day Three Live at 2:30 pm

DAY'S EVENT

AFC Challenge Cup

- Sri Lanka vs Brunei (3:30 pm)
- Nepal vs Bhutan (6:00 pm)

Venue: M A Aziz Stadium, Chittagong

- Tajikistan vs Macau (3:30 pm)
- Kyrgyzstan vs Pakistan (6:00 pm)

Venue: BNS

Palestine toy with Guam



SPORTS REPORTER

Goals were the order of the day at the Bangabandhu National Stadium and Palestine alone got eleven of them as they racked up a double figure scoreline against the minnows from Guam. At the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong, India got off on the right foot after blanking Afghanistan 2-0 in a much more evenly contested encounter. In the day's other game at the MA Aziz Stadium, Chinese Taipei just edged out Philippines 1-0 in a game where the latter had a player sent off.

PALESTINE 11: GUAM 0

Fahed Attal slammed a double-hattrick as Palestine cautioned their AFC Challenge Cup rivals with a flurry of goals in the opening match at the Bangabandhu National

Stadium, sweeping aside fancied Guam 11-0.

Palestine, the second-ranked side in the tournament, bombarded the rival goal with a series of raids in an embarrassingly one-sided affair and took six minutes to open the floodgate when Ahmed Keshkesh placed a left-footer past Guam goalkeeper Brett Maluwelmgem.

Run ragged by their mighty opponents, there was no respite for Guam who conceded an 8-0 lead at the break with forward Fahed finding the net five times.

He scored a hattrick in twelve minutes, before slamming home two more, the first of which was a stunning left footed volley.

For Palestine, Fardy Salem and Chile based Francisco put in eye-catching performances. Palestine coach Mohammed Sabbah complimented a good performance. "It was our first match against Guam so we did not know the opposition. I am

happy with Fahed who scored six and Francisco, who was really tremendous at the flank."

INDIA 2: AFGHANISTAN 0

A brace by Vimal Pariyar ensured a successful start to India's campaign as they defeated Afghanistan 2-0 in their Group A match at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong on Saturday.

India dominated the proceedings from the start and Pariyar's shot in the 19th minute hit the woodwork. Thokchom Singh skirted two defenders in the 35th minute and supplied the ball to Pariyar, who easily tapped it in.

India led 1-0 at the break.

Afghanistan started offensively after the restart but missed two easy chances. In the 52nd minute, Hafizullah Qadami missed a sitter after a cross from Mohammad Dalal Afshar and he once again failed to find the net 13 minutes later.

Pariyar made it 2-0 for India in the 60th minute on a pass from

Xavier Vijay Kumar.

Indian coach Islam Akhmedov, however, was not satisfied with the performance of the players. "I am happy with the result but not with the performance. I hope the players will play more confidently in the second match," he said.

CHINESE TAIPEI 1: PHILIPPINES 0

A solitary goal by Wei-Lun Chuang helped Chinese Taipei overcome 10-man Philippines 1-0 in their match in the AFC Challenge Cup at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong on Saturday.

Chuang scored the all-important goal in the 19th minute to give his side three points from the opener.

Substitute Emelio Caligdong of

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(L) Palestines' double hattrick hero Fahed Attal on the attack against Guam at the Bangabandhu National Stadium while (R) India's striker Vimal (C) is challenged by two Afghan defenders during their opening match of the AFC Challenge Cup at the MA Aziz Stadium on Saturday.

PHOTOS: STAR