

Tickets for first Test on sale

SPORTS REPORTER

Tickets for the first Test match of the GrameenPhone Australia tour of Bangladesh are in sale at different branches of The City Bank in Dhaka and Narayanganj. The tickets will be available at the bank's principal branch at Dilkusha and Gulshan in Dhaka, and at the Tanbazar and Nitaiganj branch in Narayanganj. These four branches will remain open on Friday as well.

The prices for gallery tickets are Tk 30 while special enclosure is priced at Tk 100. Ticket prices for club-house area are Tk 300 and VIP tickets are being sold at Tk 500.

BD to play at junior ITF meet

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will participate at the International Tennis Federation (ITF) Junior Davis Cup Asia-Oceania group in Malaysia from May 1.

This is Bangladesh's first appearance in the competition.

Play-off matches to determine three players to represent Bangladesh were held yesterday among eight competitors.

A non-playing captain will also be travelling with the three selected players.

Kumble eyes ODI spot

AFP, Bangalore

Prolific Indian spinner Anil Kumble said Thursday he had not lost hope of playing in next year's World Cup in the West Indies since he had plenty of cricket left in him.

"It'll be a great honour to serve the team in the World Cup," said the 35-year-old who has not played one-day cricket since a triangular series in Sri Lanka last August.

"I am ready to play for the country any time and in any form of game. It is for the selectors and team management to decide."

Kumble, India's highest wicket-taker in both forms of the game with 510 scalps in 106 Tests and 329 in 264 one-dayers, said he remained

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PHOTO: STAR

WELCOME TO BANGLADESH: Australian cricketers (L-R) Brett Lee, Damien Martyn and Adam Gilchrist are all smiles upon their arrival at the Zia International Airport on Thursday.

Ponting & co in town Aussies' no to press frustrates all

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Ricky Ponting's invincibles arrived in the city on Thursday morning to play their first full series in Bangladesh.

While the galaxy of stars landed at the Zia International Airport at 8:40 am, there were hardly any fans around because of tight security measures taken for the visitors.

Only a few Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) officials were there to receive the world champions, who will play two Tests and three one-day internationals during their

three-week tour.

But the real disappointment was in store for the local cricket enthusiasts when there were no first-day reactions from the Australian side.

It has become almost a common practice in modern day cricket that the visiting team attends a press conference on their arrival and there had been no exceptions when the other Test teams visited the country.

But this time the Australians portrayed their mighty stature in this issue too, as they decided to keep mum and break the long-standing tradition.

It was obvious that the decision frustrated the local reporters most, but the travelling Australian journal-

ists were also surprised by their team's decision and they found no reason behind it.

"It's absolutely unfortunate. We can't understand why your board accepted it when you have maintained the tradition for other visiting sides," questioned a reporter from an Australian news agency to a local journalist.

BCB officials however said that they were helpless about the matter as the Australians were rigid about their decision not to face the press, citing jetlag and tiredness.

The Aussies have come here

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PHOTO: STAR

YOU SHOULD'VE TAKEN THAT: Bangladesh fast bowler Mashrafe-Bin-Mortuza fails to take a catch while captain Habibul Bashar watches during a training session at the Mirpur indoor facilities on Thursday.

Mashrafe boosts Tigers

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) announced a 14-member Test squad on Thursday with leading paceman Mashrafe-Bin-Mortuza coming in the side to play a two-match Test series against Australia.

Chief selector Faruque Ahmed declared Mashrafe, who was rested during the home series against Sri Lanka as a precautionary measure for his back pain, fully fit to face the Aussie challenge in the Test matches.

The 'Narail Express' replaces Tapash Baisya while wicketkeeper-

cum-batsman Mushfiqur Rahim is the other notable absentee in the squad from the preceding series against Sri Lanka.

Left-arm spinners Manjarul Islam and Abdur Razzak were the other players who were eliminated from the 18-member preliminary list.

"Mashrafe is fully fit to play the longer-version of the game and no doubt his return will offer us a very sweet headache while selecting the two new ball bowlers. It is great that we are going to get back our main strike bowler in action against the toughest team in the world," said Faruque during the home side's practice at the Mirpur indoor facilities yesterday.

"Definitely we will put more

emphasis in our spin department. In that case we have to take a tough decision about axing an inform paceman. If we consider current form, our two new pacers (Shahadat Hossain and Syed Raseel) did excellent job but we all know what an exceptional player Mashrafe is. He has already proved that he can give any team in the world a tough time," he added.

The former national skipper also explained young Mushfiqur's exclusion from the Test side. "We just kept him out of the squad; not dropped him. We still believe he has the ability to play better cricket in the longer version but we

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India romp to series win

Cricket

AFP, Kochi

Captain Rahul Dravid led from the front as India crushed England by four wickets here on Thursday to take an unassailable 4-0 lead in the seven-match one-day series.

Dravid fashioned England's dismissal for 237 with astute bowling changes and then hit 65 off 73 balls to help the hosts surpass the modest target with 16 deliveries to spare at the Nehru stadium.

England, needing a win to stay afloat in the series, was bowled out

in 48.4 overs despite a fine 77 off 82 balls from Kevin Pietersen and 49 from wicket-keeper Geraint Jones.

Some 75,000 home fans braved stifling heat and humidity in this south-western port city to cheer India's eighth one-day win in a row and the 16th in their last 20 matches.

India's 14th consecutive victory while chasing a target surpassed a 21 year old record set by the West Indies in 1984-85.

Dravid put on 54 for the first wicket with Virender Sehwag (26) and 76 for the second with Irfan Pathan, who contributed 46 off 56 balls.

The Indian captain hit nine boundaries in his 69th one-day half-century before he miscued a drive off his English counterpart Andrew Flintoff to Matthew Hoggard at mid-off.

There was a minor hiccup when Pathan and Mohammad Kaif were dismissed on the same total of 152, but Yuvraj Singh (48) and Suresh Raina (21) put on a match-winning 72 for the fifth wicket.

Both batsmen fell off successive deliveries from James Anderson with 14 needed for victory, but it came too late for England to salvage a win.

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AFC Challenge Cup fixtures revised

SPORTS REPORTER

The organisers were forced to reschedule the AFC Challenge Cup fixtures yesterday due to the adverse weather conditions.

After two matches were abandoned in the group stages and had to be replayed, the quarterfinals in Dhaka have been put off by a day and now will be played on April 9 and 10 instead of April 8 and 9 respectively.

Hosts Bangladesh will take on Group D runners-up on April 10. The date for the semifinal remains unchanged but the kick-off time at the capital has been brought forward to 3.30pm from 5pm.

In Chittagong, the quarterfinals and semifinal dates remain unchanged but the kick-off times have been also advanced to 3.30pm.

The kickoff time for the April 16 will be announced later.

SL A level series

SPORTS REPORTER

An unbeaten half-century by Malintha Gajjanayake saw visiting Sri Lanka A record a five-wicket victory over Bangladesh A in the second one-day match at the Khulna Divisional Stadium yesterday.

Gajjanayake scored 59 off 89 balls with five boundaries to guide his team to 214-5 in the penultimate over for their first win in the tour. Ian Daniels and Sri Lankan international Upal Chandana each scored 31 runs.

Left-arm seamer Shafaq Al Jabir took three wickets for 38 while Mosharraf Hossain one wicket for the home side.

Earlier, the second-string Bangladesh side scored 211-8 in their allotted 50 overs after electing to bat first. Sakib Al Hassan continued his good form with a 51-ball 41.

A 48-run ninth wicket partnership between Mohammad Sharif (28 off 30 balls) and Sahajir Hossain (32 off 13 balls) helped the hosts to post a total over 200.

For Sri Lanka A, opening bowler Ganegama took 3-30 and Kosara Kulasekara and Chandana chipped in with two wickets each.

The third and deciding one-day match will be played at the same venue on April 8.

BRIEF SCORES

BANGLADESH A: 211-8 in 50 overs (Sakib 41, Ehsanul 29, Sharif 32, Ganegama 3-30)

SRI LANKA A: 214-5 in 48.5 overs (Daniel 21, Gajjanayake 59 n.o., Chandana 31 n.o. Jabir 3-38)

Meeting of legends

PTI, Mumbai

A meeting of cricket legends took place here yesterday away from the field of play when Sachin Tendulkar met Brian Lara at a five-star hotel near the Mumbai airport.

"It was a personal and private meeting between Tendulkar and Lara," said a source connected with the hotel where the meeting took place this afternoon.

Tendulkar returned home on Wednesday from London after undergoing an arthroscopic surgery on his right shoulder while Lara is in the country on a private visit.

Fighting India impress Rahul

AGENCIES, undated

India captain Rahul Dravid said he had been impressed by the way his players had responded to difficult situations in the one-day series against England.

Thursday's win in Kochi put India 4-0 up with three to play and he is now able to rest key players with the series already in the bag.

He said: "We have been under pressure at various times in this series."

"But we are always finding people to get us out of trouble whenever we need them to. I am so proud of the boys."

Dravid, who indicated he himself might be rested for at least one of the remaining three matches, said the goal for the rest of the series was to develop the squad.

He also offered a staunch defense of England and said it would be wrong to be too hard on the tourists.

"People can be critical of them, 4-0 looks easy, but there have been times in the series when England

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Kyrgyzstan stay alive

Tajikistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal in last 8



SPORTS REPORTER

Striker Andrey Krasnov's 20-minute goal kept Kyrgyzstan alive for a quarterfinal berth of the AFC Challenge Cup from Group D with a solitary goal win over an understrength Tajikistan, who made it to the last eight despite their first loss after Pakistan were held 2-2 by Macau in the same group later yesterday.

Tajikistan, who have a superior goal difference in the so-called group of death, finished top of the table with six points. The remaining qualifiers will be decided after today's rematch between Kyrgyzstan and Macau. The match, earlier abandoned due to inclement weather, will kick off at the

Bangabandhu National Stadium at 2pm.

Pakistan ended with four points while Kyrgyzstan and Macau have three and one point respectively. A draw would be enough for Kyrgyzstan to reach the knockout stage on basis of goal difference but if they lose, it would be open for Pakistan or Macau.

Bhutan did Nepal a favour by holding Brunei to a goalless draw in the Group B finale, paving the way for the Himalayan Kingdom's qualification for the last eight.

Sri Lanka and Nepal, who shared a 1-1 draw earlier at the Chittagong MA Aziz Stadium, both entered the quarterfinals.

Sri Lanka, group champions with seven points will face Chinese Taipei while Nepal, who edged Brunei by virtue of better goal difference after finishing level on four points, meet

Group A winners India.

KYRGYZSTAN - TAJIKISTAN

Kyrgyzstan began lively in a do-or-die match against their central Asian neighbours and settled match from a half chance when Krasnov deflected a powerful right-side drive by Verevkin into Tajikistan goalkeeper Khabibulloev's near post with his knee.

Tajikistan, who rested seven players from their regular line-up, were chasing shadows and survived a close call in the 24th minute when Krasnov, unmarked inside the seven-yard box, failed to touch a low cross by Djamsheidov.

With Kyrgyzstan tightening their grip on the game, substitute Ishenbaev threatened to score just after the hour when he was sent

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PHOTO: STAR

Andrey Krasnov (C) defies two Tajikistan defenders to score Kyrgyzstan's winner in Thursday's AFC Challenge Cup match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Nervy Barca edge thru'



AFP, Barcelona

Barcelona reached the semifinals of the Champions League here Wednesday after goals from Ronaldinho and Samuel Eto'o saw the Spanish giants defeat Benfica 2-0.

Ronaldinho could even afford to squander a penalty early on before the Catalans finally subdued their Portuguese opponents to set up a semifinal against six-time winners and last year's beaten finalists AC Milan.

Brazilian world footballer of the year Ronaldinho opened the scoring on 19 minutes following superb approach work from Henrik Larsson and Cameroun international striker Eto'o.

Eto'o then calmed shredded home nerves with a second with a minute remaining to finish a job only half done following a 0-0 draw in Lisbon last week.

"Tonight, we picked an apposite

moment to get some goals," smiled Rijkard in tacit acceptance that Barca should have buried their rivals in the first game.

"I think the team deserve congratulations for this win, which is a fine success for us," added the Dutchman after putting one over on compatriot and Benfica coach Ronald Koeman, scorer of Barca's winner in the 1992 final at Wembley for the Catalan club's only European Cup success to date.

An outplayed Benfica should have scored a priceless away goal to go clear on away goals just after the hour mark but Sabrosa Simao inexplicably found the side-netting from close range with only Barca keeper Victor Valdes to beat after a delightful pass from Fabrizio Miccoli.

Barca had spurred a handful of chances in the away leg and compounded their frustration as Ronaldinho flunked a fifth-minute penalty.

Dutch flier Mark Van Bommel jinked his way into the box and his attempt at a lofted pass caught Petit on the right hand for a clear-cut

spot-kick awarded by Slovakian referee Lubos Michel.

But although Ronaldinho's shot was cleanly struck Benfica keeper Marcelo Moretto, buoyed by a brilliant first-leg display and who also kept two clean sheets to help knock out holders Liverpool, made a fine diving save to his right.

But despite his early act of defiance Moretto was powerless to stop the blue and claret tide as Ronaldinho made amends on 19 minutes.

Larsson dispossessed Beto and fed Eto'o in the inside right channel and the latter, top scorer in Primera Liga, duly showed he possesses the gifts of provider and poacher in equal measure by stroking a pinpoint pass beyond four defenders to leave Ronaldinho a simple side-footed finish for the Brazilian's seventh goal of the campaign.

An ambitious Eto'o lob could have put Benfica, twice European champions but way back in 1961 and 1962 in Eusebio's heyday, on the canvas 20 minutes before the

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PHOTO: AFP

Barcelona's talismanic forward Ronaldinho (L) vies with Benfica's Ricardo Rocha during their Champions League quarterfinal second leg tie at the Nou Camp on Wednesday.



Did U Know?

The best matadors in Peru used to be women.



Bob Woolmer

(Pakistan cricket coach)

"Asif is one of those McGrath-like bowlers who bowl really tight line and lengths and just get the ball to go in and out a little. He moves the ball, is difficult for batsman to read and he is not slow. He is the sort of bowler that Pakistan has not had for some time and we know we need to look after him."

While praising paceman Mohammad Asif after he bowled Pakistan to Test series victory against Sri Lanka on Wednesday.



AFC Challenge Cup
Kyrgyzstan v Macau
Rematch at 2:00 pm
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium