

Mukhles' golden swan-song

Sports Reporter

Mukhlesur Rahman, the Mr Consistent of Bangladesh's ventures in international swimming, probably made his last appearance in SAF Games pool yesterday, but won the gold outright in the men's 100m breast-stroke.

At the newly-built swimming pool at Mirpur, the 34-year old Navy swimmer took 1:10.32 seconds to exact a sweet revenge on his conqueror in the previous Games in the Sri Lankan capital Colombo.

Intikhab Sikander, the Sri Lankan natant who took silver yesterday, had taken the gold in the men's 100m breast stroke two years ago. Mukhles was beaten to the second spot by the narrowest of the margins then.

Yesterday the event was the same but the rulers reversed the sceptre with the yeoman of Bangladeshi swimming making it to the victory podium.

The win may have, in a flash-ahead into the future, formed a perfect swan-song for the veteran swimmer, fighting water and age in the twilight of his career. Still unmarried, Mukhles wrinkled, "This is probably my last appearance in the SAF Games. I do not think I will be around two years later."

Having won three gold medals in the three meets — starting from the fourth Games in the Pakistani capital Islamabad, followed by the fifth in Colombo and yesterday's one — Mukhles is now in balance with life and success.

"I am delighted to have helped my country in getting another gold", reflected a glistening Mukhles, who hails from Narayanjanj.

Some sort of a long distance runner of a different dimension, Mukhles has been a study in loneliness over the years.

He was the lone gold winner in the fourth Games in Islamabad, coming first in the 100m breast-stroke, his pet event.



Mukhlesur Rahman of Bangladesh is overcome with emotion after claiming the gold in the 100m breast-stroke at the Mirpur swimming complex yesterday. — Star photo

Two years later he snatched the 200m gold in Sri Lanka. He also won the silver in that 100m breast-stroke that year.

The silver of yesterday's meet, which went to Sri Lankan Intikhab Sikander, could have very well gone to another Bangladeshi.

Mizanur Rahman Qarar, the proud holder of the first new record of the Sixth SAF Games, actually got the bronze medal yesterday. But the eight-

year-old who rewrote the 200m breast-stroke record on December 21, tried for a fatal stroke instead of reaching for the finish mark and Sikander got there ahead of him to claim the silver.

Mizan's ruing was soon replaced by genuine revelry at his senior compatriot's performance. "It's all the same. Mukhles Bhai or me, it is gold for Bangladesh, anyway." Although Mukhles, Mizan

and Kawser did their very best to add to the hosts' tally, run-away favourites India, powered by such natants as Sebastian Xavier, Jai Abhijit and Rajeev Nagpal, led the swimming medals table with a haul of six golds, five silvers and a bronze after four days of competition.

Yesterday's success reveue at the pool was a heady mixture of youth and experience. While Mukhles defied age and monotony to win the gold, Pakistan's teenage sensation Kamal Salman Masud won the gold in the men's 400m free style.

The 14-year-old from Sind actually won the first individual gold for his country yesterday, clocking 4:18.00 seconds. Even the team gold that till yesterday looked like the centre of a big circle in the medal's table, owed Masud's perspiration and skill. With Billal Bux, Sabir Hussain and Maruf he snatched the gold in the 4x200m freestyle relay on Thursday.

In the day's third event, Bhanu Sachdev of India captured the gold in the men's 200m backstroke with a timing of 2:13.82 secs.

Bangladesh's Kawser Ahmed won the silver as Pakistan's Taj Mohammad was disqualified for foul turning.

Arshad Mehmood of Pakistan took the bronze. Competition resumes at eleven this morning with three finals and a heat scheduled.

According to Indian coach KV Sharma, Indian swimmers should clinch the issue in both the 200 metres freestyle and the 100m butterfly today where the Indian entries are Rajiv Nagpal and Suresh Kumar respectively. In the 50-m free style, though Sebastian Xavier has been tipped for the title, it was very difficult to say who would win, as much would depend on a good start, Sharma felt and added that the balding Intikhab Sikander of Sri Lanka would challenge Xavier in this event.



W Chaminda Fonseka of Sri Lanka clearing the last hurdle to win the gold of the men's 110-m hurdles in the Sixth SAF Games at the Mirpur Stadium yesterday. — Star photo

No time for the beauties!

By Asoka Goonetilleke, Guest Writer

Spanish eyes! Tear drops are falling from your eyes when you cough! (Sorry, Mr Engelbert Humperdink!)

This, let me dedicate to those striking lasses in the SAF Games Main Media Centre. Strikingly beautiful. Well clad. Upright. Well oriented. But, I'm married.

I was on my way to the MMC yesterday morning. I crossed my eyes with that beauty on the rickshaw. Honestly, my eyes must've been focussed on the sun, too. Hence, the innocent wink.

She returned the smile for 10.61 seconds.

The 'Dhaka flying machine' (rickshaw) changed to top gear, with a throw of spit on to the road. Why? Did you suspect the sun was rising for me? You jealous rickshaw-wallah! I have a habit not to spit on the road, even if I am suffering from tuberculosis bacillus? To spit on the road, or for that matter, in public is sin.

The rickshaw-puller's behaviour did not deem fit for me to get off the blocks. As I arrived in the MMC, the newspapers screamed at me with their banner headlines, about the alarmingly booming population growth rate in Bangladesh. Those beauts in the MMC, please take note.

A population should grow, to be called a nation. But, not at all, alarmingly. If a government cannot restrain this fun, there is a whole somewhere. Less recreations, too, is a leader to such problems. If one goes deep into the problem, he would see the problem lies at home — the rural areas. Maybe, if women could run faster than Bimal Tarafdar, well, it could be another solution, though the men are upright, elegant, debonair and so on...

One must not forget, today is the all-important day for the Christians. It is Christmas. I've told somewhere that I am a devout Buddhist. When on overseas assignments, I enquire about Buddhist temples and, if time permits, I always make it a point to go there and pray, and also pray for courage and strength to go on with my assignments successfully.

It is really, really, really fascinating to hear that Roberto Baggio, who was once again voted the European footballer-of-the-year, say, "Today, Buddhism helps me control my mind better". Merry Christmas!

Akram wrecks Zimbabwe

KARACHI, Dec 24: Pakistan beat Zimbabwe by seven wickets in their first one-day international here.

Today dismissed the tourists for 143 thanks to career best figures of five for 15 from skipper Wasim Akram, reports AFP.

He improved his own record of five for 16 against South Africa earlier this year and was declared man-of-the-match.

Akram won the toss and put the tourists to bat.

Leading the Pakistani attack, he removed his counterpart Andy Flower with the first ball of the limited overs match played at the packed National Stadium.

Flower playing an outswinger was caught behind for a duck.

His next victim was Zimbabwe's dependable, Alistair Campbell, to make it 19 for two.

Aaqib Javed caused another shock when he dismissed Andy's younger brother Grant Flower for six. He captured two wickets while Waqar Younis, declared man-of-the-series for his 27-wicket haul in the just-concluded three Test series against Zimbabwe, became the most expensive bowler conceding 43 for no wicket in his seven overs.

David Houghton in his superb performance hit 52. Houghton and Derek Dekker added 70 runs in their fourth wicket partnership before Dekker was run out on 33.

The last five batsmen contributed only 26 runs with

David Brain b Aaqib Javed 4
Eddo Brandes lbw 2
Wasim Akram 2
Stephen Peall b Wasim Akram 0
Heath Streak c Javed 2
Mihad b Wasim Akram 2
John Rennie not out 3
Extras: (b-1, lb-9, nb-2, w-3) 15
Total: (all out in 38 overs) 143
Fall of wickets: 1-0; 2-19; 3-22; 4-92; 5-117; 6-128; 7-131; 8-131; 9-139.

Bowling table with columns O, M, R, W and names of players like Wasim Akram, Waqar Younis, Aaqib Javed, Mushtaq Ahmed, Salim Malik, Asif Mujtaba.

PAKISTAN:
Saeed Anwar b Streak 68
Asif Mujtaba b Brain 11
Inzamam-ul-Haq b Streak 12
Basit Ali not out 41
Rashid Latif not out 10
Extras: (b-2, w-2, nb-1) 5
Total: (For three wickets-33.5 overs) 147
Fall of wickets: 1-18; 2-48; 3-126

Did not bat: Javed Mihad, Salim Malik, Wasim Akram, Waqar Younis, Mushtaq Ahmed, Aaqib Javed.

SCOREBOARD table with columns O, M, R, W and names of players like Brandes, Brain, Peall, Streak, Rennie, Dekker.

Result: Pakistan won by seven wickets
Man-of-the-match: Wasim Akram
Second match: December 25, Rawalpindi
Third match: December 27, Lahore

Rhodes may play in first Test

BRISBANE, Australia, Dec 24: Injured South African batsman and master fielder Jonty Rhodes has a good chance to play in the first cricket Test against Australia, starting in Melbourne on Sunday, reports AFP.

Rhodes suffered a broken left hand in a one-day match against Australia in Sydney nine days ago and had initially been expected to miss the opening Test meeting between the countries in 24 years.

The middle-order batsman and dynamic fielder has made a quicker than expected recovery and captain Kepler Wessels said here Thursday he hoped the 24-year-old would come through a fitness test on Christmas Day.

"He has a good chance to play," Wessels said. The South Africans finished their preparation for the three-match series by playing out a draw with Queensland here Thursday.

Queensland were never in the hunt for 377 for victory and batted out the final days to finish at 268 for five.

Opener Trevor Bardsley fell one run short of his third century of the season, being trapped lbw for 99 by Fanie de Villiers, while the South Africans were able to give their bowlers another decent workout in blazing heat.

Wessels spent the day in the dressing room resting a sore

right knee but the 36-year-old said his absence was a legacy of five operations on the leg and would not affect his appearance in the Test.

"I've had a bit of treatment and a rest today but I'll be okay," Wessels said.

"It was best not to do too much here because there's a lot of cricket coming up."

"I've had five operations on the leg so there's not a lot that makes it better other than rest."

"I know how to deal with it so it's not a great strain."

A sloppy South African effort in the field ruined any hopes the tourists might have had of pulling off victory.

The tourists dropped four catches and the Queenslanders were content to take a day's centre-wicket practice.

Aside from Bardsley, Geoff Foley and Stuart Law both pushed their way into the 30s while rookie batsman Jimmy Maher remained unbeaten on 50 at the close.

Maher could consider himself lucky to notch his maiden first-class half-century as De Villiers had a confident lbw appeal rejected when he was on 49.

De Villiers had spent the day charging in relentlessly, despite the intense heat, and was less than 'impressed' to see the teenager get the benefit of the doubt.

De Villiers also distinguished himself when he bowled Greg Rowell for 16, hitting the stumps with such force that he sent the leg ball through the air three quarters of the way to the boundary.

Bardsley brought up 50 in two and a half hours but was becalmed in the 90s and finally trapped in front by De Villiers, falling for 99 for the second time in his career.

Strike bowler Allan Donald had Foley caught behind by Richardson for 39 but the man tagged 'white lightning' is still to produce his first high-voltage performance on tour.

Donald delivered 20 overs and finished with 1-55, giving him a return of 1-98 from 31 overs for the match.

India, Nepal in soccer final

Sports Reporter

Two former champions — India and Nepal — will fight to own the football gold of the Sixth SAF Games on an alien ground on Sunday.

Though the Mirpur Stadium, which is expected to stage the finale from five pm in the afternoon tomorrow, will be a completely new experience for both teams, yet Dhaka, the city, is likely to be a pilgrimage for the Indians.

India's first football gold was won in Dhaka way back in 1985, the year of the second SAF Games. They, of course, followed it up with a similar show in the successive Games in 1987 with Indian city Calcutta playing the hosts.

In the second of the two group matches held at the Dhaka Stadium yesterday, India were held to a two-all draw, yet they managed to throw holders Pakistan off the tournament.

Pakistan, who won the gold in Colombo, were on a hat-trick at these Games since they had won the gold in the fourth Games in Islamabad, too.

But they had the visions of doom right on the opening day when Sri Lanka beat them by the odd goal in three. Yesterday, too, their fate followed the same minutes of the resumption. Tahir Agha served the ball across the Indian goal and opportunist striker Md Noman, who had scored against Sri

Lanka in the previous match, headed the ball home with a reliable Hemant Dora under the Indian bar having no chance at all (1-1).

The hawk-eyed Noman was again on target, seven minutes after putting his team at par with the no-love-lost neighbour as India, riding high on a two-nil success in their opener against Sri Lanka, took a 1-0 lead in the dying minutes of the first half showing cohesion and better team work.

Up against opponents who held a slight edge over them in average height and strength, India concentrated on control of the midfield with the quartet of Tajinder Kumar, Jacob, Gunabir Singh and Aqul Ansari enjoying more space and time than their counterparts.

But it took India almost the end of the first half to forge ahead. In the 43rd minute, the robust Bhupinder Thakur rose timely to nod the ball in from a goal mouth melee past a bemused Pak custodian Tajuddin following a corner kick (1-0).

The Pakistanis pitched themselves in the second half and reaped results within six hours. This time Itikhar did the spadework and Noman scored his third goal of the meet to emerge the highest scorer till the final with a well-placed shot (2-1).

The Pakistanis resorted to rough tackling to keep the goal-hungry Indians at bay and the

Thai referee had a busy time in maintaining the statutes of the game. Four Pakistanis were brought to book while one Indian was cautioned with the yellow card for an attempt to pay back their neighbours from across the border in the same coin.

However, the Indians kept up the pressure and got the equaliser five minutes before the long whistle. Tajinder latched on to a Gunabir throw in to find the net (2-2).

The Indians more than earned their right to have a go at the gold for the third time, with a haul of three points from two matches.

Pakistan, on the other hand, finished with a solitary point from their two group matches.

NEPAL THROUGH

Earlier, in the first match of the day Nepal, the gold winners of the inaugural Games in Kathmandu who rekindled the hopes of a similar defeat with an upset 0-1 win over hosts Bangladesh on December 22, drew goalless with no-hopers Maldives.

With three points in their kitty from two matches Nepal ensured a date with fancied India in the final.

The Maldivians will play the Sri Lankans for the bronze medal.

With Bangladesh already out of the tournament, the soccer programme has failed to draw the crowds. There were hardly three thousand people in the stands yesterday willing to fork out Taka 20 for the pleasure of watching the other teams.



India's Shiny Wilson powers ahead of her rivals to win the women's 800 metres in a new Sixth SAF Games record time of 2:04.63 at the Mirpur Stadium yesterday. — Star photo

VI SAF GAMES SCHEDULE FOR TODAY

Following is the schedule for today's events in the Sixth SAF Games:

- Athletics: 10:30 am to 3:30 pm at the Mirpur Stadium.
- Men's 400m hurdles
- Women's long jump
- Women's discus
- Women's 4x400m relay
- Men's 4x400m relay
- Men's shot put
- Men's 800m
- Women's 4x100m relay
- Men's 4x100m relay

Boxing: 6pm to 10:25 pm at the Dhaka Stadium: all the twelve finals.

Football: Rest day. Kabaddi: 3:30pm at the Hockey Stadium.

Table Tennis: 9:30 am to 5 pm at the Dhanmondi gym: mixed doubles matches.

Tennis: Mixed doubles and men's doubles final at 8 am and 2 pm at the Tennis Complex.

Shooting: Men's clay target skeet 125 birds at the BKSP shooting range. Jirani, Savar, from 10 am.

Swimming: 11 am to 12:20 pm at the Mirpur Swimming Pool.

300m free style
100m butterfly
50m freestyle
400m individual medley heats.

Volleyball: 9 am to 11 am and 4 pm to 6 pm at the Mirpur Indoor Stadium.

Wrestling: Finals of 10 weight categories from 2 pm to 4:15 at the Hockey Stadium.

BFF could do with a Dalmiya

By Manash Chakravarty, Guest Writer

These days football is not played in the ground alone. It starts from the grouping of the tournament and ends with the prize distribution ceremony. It appears that the Bangladesh Football Federation turned a deaf ear to this aspect. They failed to seize the home team's advantage.

Bangladesh played their first match at the Mirpur Stadium and the second at the Dhaka Stadium. Even a child of football knows that the first match of the tournament is very difficult for any team. One can easily remember the fate of world champions Italy against Belgium in Mexico in 1986 and that of Argentina against Cameroon four years later. On both occasions, the champions left the ground with their heads down. So the Bangladesh team which drew their first match was not any exception.

But one wonders why they were asked to play their second match at the Dhaka Stadium. The two grounds are different and players face an uphill task to adjust themselves with the ground conditions.

The Dhaka Stadium ground is awfully bad. The bounce is

uneven, the grass is hard and ball players like India's Vijayan or Bangladesh's Rumi find it very difficult to show their skills here. May be the organizing committee gave more importance to gate money than the interest of the nation and paid the price heavily. Two matches at two different venues cost them dearly. And if you look at the two finalists, you will see that the teams which played both their matches on same ground are in the finals. India and Nepal grabbed the opportunity in a maximum way. And as the final is slated for Mirpur, both of them will face the same problem. Had the Bangladesh Football Federation looked into this aspect, they perhaps would not be in this awkward situation.

And have they been successful in bringing the spectators to the grounds? To say the least, no. Half of the huge stadiums were vacant. Actually they failed to 'sell' the tournament. These days sports is not only an entertainment media, but a saleable commodity also. And with the advent of the electronics media people hardly spend money and time for going to the field. Then, the only way to attract them is to sell the item.

In this aspect, Bangladesh faces the same problem as India. The Nehru Gold Cup, once rated as the eleventh best football tournament in the world, has lost its value and has been demoted to a biennial wastage of money. The All India Football Federation end their responsibility by bringing some third graded teams and do not spend much time to popularise the tournament. But look at Jogmohan Dalmia, the BCCI Secretary pulled a lakh of people to the final of the recent Hero Cup, a tournament which was devoid of world champions Pakistan, runners-up England and the much-rated Kwisa and Kangaroos. Actually, Dalmia sold the tournament to the million of spectators.

The Bangladesh Football Federation could not do that. Hence the home team did not receive any crowd support, which is very much necessary to overcome the pressure of being favourites and the home team. Italy in the 1990 World Cup and Australia in the 1992 cricket World Cup succumbed to this pressure and vanished from the scene. The same thing happened to Bangladesh. But why only blame the players and the coach?