

Ganguly for two-tier Tests

AFP, New Delhi

Indian captain Sourav Ganguly said a two-tier system should be introduced to ensure a level playing field if the International Cricket Council (ICC) increased the number of Test playing nations.

"The ICC is contemplating increasing the number of Test playing countries, but for the standard of the game to be preserved it would be better to have a two-tier system," Ganguly told reporters here.

"A two-tier system would ensure more competitiveness and allow weak teams to work their way up gradually," said Ganguly, India's most successful Test captain with 15 wins.

Ten nations have so far been accorded Test status with Kenya next in line after becoming surprise semi-finalists at last year's World Cup.

Bangladesh were the last side to be given Test status in 2000, but have failed to register a win in 28 matches.

Zimbabwe too are struggling at Test level since a stand-off between the Zimbabwe Cricket Union and White players over selection issues which led to the firing of 15 cricketers.

ICC President Ehsan Mani had indicated at a seminar arranged by the Asian Cricket Council (ACC) at Lahore in Pakistan over the weekend that the ICC was aiming to globalise the game.

"The ICC would love more countries to join the Test cricket fraternity but they must be ready," said Mani, who took over the two-year presidency in June 2003.

Only four countries -- Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe and Bangladesh -- have been accorded Test status in the past 52 years.

Parreira drops three

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Brazil coach Carlos Alberto Parreira has released three players for two friendly matches which serve as warm-up fixtures for their 2006 World Cup qualifying campaign.

Sao Paulo striker Luis Fabiano, Palmeiras keeper Marcos and Flamengo midfielder Felipe, called up in a 24-strong squad a week ago, have been released to their clubs and will not play the friendly against France in Paris on May 20 or the match against a Catalan selection on May 25.

The players were let go because of Sao Paulo's Libertadores Cup commitments and as Palmeiras and Flamengo were still battling away in the Brazil Cup.

However Parreira said the players must return to the squad on May 28 for World Cup qualifiers against Argentina on June 2 and Chile on June 6.

Parreira has called up Vasco da Gama keeper Fabio as cover.

Parreira said he was not happy certain Europe clubs, and particularly Bayern Munich where Ze Roberto plays, have been trying to keep their players back for club fixtures.

"That's no good for us," Parreira said. "It's an obstacle in our path as we build-up towards the World Cup qualifiers."

Barua inspires

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SCORES IN BRIEF Gazi Tank: 224-7 in 50 overs (Niaz 21, Sumon 109 not out, Shafig 29, Moniruzzaman 16, Ashique 2-31).

Aktel: 143-10 in 47.2 overs (Mawla 38, Kalim 24, Nafis 17, Saikat 15, Shaiful 3-18, Moniruzzaman 2-22).

CROSSWORD

By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down. Includes a solution for the crossword puzzle.

Ebrahim keeps hosts afloat



REUTERS, Bulawayo

Dion Ebrahim scored his ninth Test half-century to bolster the faltering Zimbabwe batting on the first day of the second Test against Sri Lanka in Bulawayo on Friday.

At tea Ebrahim was unbeaten on 70 out of his team's total of 184 for six after the home side had been put into bat.

The patient Ebrahim featured in partnerships of 51 for the third wicket with Stuart Matsikenyeri and 52 for the fourth with captain Tatenda Taibu.

Ebrahim, who faced 161 balls and hit 12 fours, kept the innings together by showing the application that was lacking among his team mates.

The left-arm pace bowler Chaminda Vaas drew first blood when he had Brendan Taylor caught behind for five by wicketkeeper Prasanna Jayawardene.

In his next over, Vaas induced a sweetly struck but uppish drive from Mark Vermeulen which was smartly caught at extra cover by Muttiah Muralitharan. Vermeulen, playing his first Test since fracturing his skull on Zimbabwe's tour to Australia in February, was out without scoring.

Matsikenyeri and Ebrahim were separated in the third over before lunch when Matsikenyeri drove a ball from off spinner Muralitharan firmly to mid-on and was run out for 45 by Farveez Maharoof's throw.

Taibu, who turned 21 on Friday, was out 13 overs after lunch for 27 when he drove at a delivery from medium pacer Maharoof to be caught by Thilan Samaraweera at short cover.

Sri Lanka's domination of the first two sessions was assured when they removed Alester Maregwede and Elton Chigumbura in the space of 11 deliveries.

Sanath Jayasuriya ran Maregwede out for 24 with a throw from leg gully to bowler Muralitharan and Chigumbura (0) edged Vaas to Mahela Jayawardene at second slip.

Muralitharan came on to bowl five overs before lunch but did not deliver his controversial doosra.

The International Cricket Council has ruled that the doosra, which turns away from right-handed batsmen, transgresses its regulations on throwing and the Sri Lankan cricket authorities have advised Muralitharan not to bowl it.

Zimbabwe, who lost the first Test by an innings and 240 runs, were again forced to select a weakened side after 15 experienced players

made themselves unavailable in a dispute with the Zimbabwe Cricket Union.

SCORECARD

Scoreboard at tea on the first day of the second Test between Zimbabwe and Sri Lanka at Queens Sports Club on Friday: ZIMBABWE: First innings Matsikenyeri run out (Maharoof) 45 Taylor c Jayawardene b Vaas 5 Vermeulen c Muralitharan b Vaas 0 Ebrahim not out 70 Taibu c Samaraweera b Maharoof 27 Maregwede run out (Jayasuriya) 24 Chigumbura c Jayawardene b Vaas 0

Nkala not out 2 Extras (1lb, 8nb, 2w) 11 Total (for 6 wickets in 59 overs) 184 Fall of wickets: 1-24, 2-31, 3-82, 4-134, 5-176, 6-176

Table with columns: Bowler, O, M, R, W. Lists bowlers like Vaas, Zoysa, Maharoof, Muralitharan, Jayasuriya, and umpires Rudi Koertzen and Billy Bowden.

FA won't block Thaksin bid

REUTERS, London

The English Football Association (FA) and the Premier League will not block Thailand's billionaire prime minister from buying a stake in Liverpool, spokesmen for the two ruling bodies said on Friday.

Thaksin Shinawatra, a former telecoms tycoon, has said his odds of winning a stake in the premier league club are "better-than-even" after Liverpool's board rebuffed a rival bid from British businessman Steve Morgan.

"There is nothing in our regulations to prevent such a bid from going ahead," an FA spokesman said.

The Premier League, administrators of England's top-flight division, said it did not comment on speculation but a spokesman said: "The Premier League is a global phenomenon and as such we can hardly be surprised that it attracts foreign investment."

Schools h'ball

FROM PAGE 13 In yesterday's semifinals, the Bandura boys eliminated Birshreshtha Abdur Rouf School 16-4 while Narinda beat Ansar VDP School 18-13 at the Dhanmondi Women's Sports Complex.

In the girls' final, Viquarunnissa Noon School face Scholastica.

In the semis, Viquarunnissa ousted BIS 12-4 while Scholastica defeated Mohammadpur Preparatory 17-4.

The final and the third-place play-off will be held on May 20.

Calypso Cocktail

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holder. "I was the head of the West Indies Cricket Board's disciplinary committee when Lara and Curtly Ambrose were summoned for a hearing for an incident after the 1995 tour to England. And I couldn't believe my eyes when they arrived."

"Lara was wearing a 'three-piece suit' while Ambrose came in a t-shirt which read 'Black & Bad'! It was a sign of total disrespect," said one of the top officials of the WICB who can not be named for obvious reasons.

But love him or hate him, Lara is still the buzz word that fills the stands.

"I don't think there will be as many spectators on Saturday and Sunday. It's a shame 'cause big players always ignore small islands like St Vincent. I only remember seeing Viv Richards two or three times during all the years he played cricket. Now it's the same with Lara," said a frustrated 'Smoker' Alexander when news broke out that the West Indies captain was not coming.

And there are others like the umpire who officiated in Bangladesh's tour opener against the West Indies Cricket Board XI who will tell you that Lara is the king of hearts.

"I have found him to be one of the most generous of persons. He is also one of the fairest of cricketers. Once he was playing a regional match and the bowler appealed for a catch behind to which the umpire lifted his finger. As Lara was walking past the official he said; you've embarrassed me Maan (by lifting your finger). I would have walked anyway."

"Which is very unusual in the Caribbean climate.

Maple Leaf h'ball from today

SPORTS REPORTER

Maple Leaf International School will take on Ispahani Girls' High School in the opening match of the Maple Leaf First Mini handball tournament today.

Fourteen schools will participate in the five-day meet. All the matches will be played at the Dhanmondi Women's Sports Complex, organisers told a press briefing at the Bangladesh Handball Federation (BHF) office yesterday.

Title sponsors Maple Leaf will provide Tk 50,000 out of the total budget of Tk one lakh.

BHF general secretary Asaduzzaman Kohinor, tournament committee chairman Badaruddin Ahmed, vice-principal of Maple Leaf Ali Karam Reza were present at the briefing.

That would leave Lazio level on points with Inter and force a play-off for fourth place.

Inter, who last lifted a trophy in 1998 when they won the UEFA Cup, have spent heavily in the past few seasons but have failed to put together a team capable of landing the Scudetto.

Lazio, who won the Italian Cup in midweek after defeating Juventus 4-2 on aggregate, still have an outside chance of snatching fourth place, but they would have to win at home to Modena - for whom defeat could mean relegation - and hope Inter and Parma both lose.

Inter, who were knocked out in the quarter-finals of the UEFA Cup by Marseille, put themselves in pole position for fourth place with a 1-0 victory over Parma at the San



Moroccan Prince Rachid Moulay (R) and former Spanish prime minister Philippe Gonzalez (L) are greeted by Moroccan supporters at FIFA headquarters in Zurich yesterday, prior to the presentations of the five African nations bidding to host the 2010 World Cup.

African showdown today

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World Cup host will be. FIFA made a brave decision when they agreed the World Cup would be moved around their confederations rather than alternate between Europe and South America.

South Korea and Japan gave Asia a World Cup to be proud of in 2002 and although the finals in 2006 will be held in the comparatively staid setting of Germany, the African finals of 2010 will be unlike the world has ever seen -- wherever they are held.

The image of African soccer has changed enormously in the last 10 years. African's best players now play all over Europe from Scotland to Serbia, from Poland to Israel.

The African Cup of Nations, rarely covered by the European

media for the first 40 years of its existence, is now shown live on television throughout the world.

Of course there are vastly differing standards from those in Europe and the rest of the world, but players from the poorest parts of Africa are now competing at the highest levels

How the polls go

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lowest number of votes is eliminated from a second round of voting.

This procedure is repeated until the last round when only two countries are left in the running.

If the two remaining countries each receive 12 of the 24 votes, FIFA President Sepp Blatter has the casting vote.

Primera Liga

Only pride left for Real



AFP, Madrid

Without a title to their name this season for the first time in five years, giants Real Madrid will still be playing for pride at bottom club Murcia on Sunday.

Real are second, and the nine-times kings of Europe and have secured their place in next season's Champions League despite having to concede the Spanish title to Valencia last Sunday, but three points will still be vital.

They face the relative ignominy of having to play in the Champions League qualifying rounds in July and August if they slip further.

Such matches would also mean that they would either have to cancel or drastically revise proposed high-profile tours of the United States or Asia.

"I'm sad (that Real haven't won anything), but my conscience is clear. I can pinpoint the match when everything started to go wrong for us," said Real coach Carlos Queiroz on Thursday.

"It was the game against Barcelona last month. Before then, we were playing well but after losing that we lost confidence, our motivation crashed and it has been hard to lift ourselves since," add the Portuguese coach.

Queiroz looks set to leave Real at the end of the season but, while he is still in charge, will have to decide who will replace the sus-

ended Brazilian World Cup winners Roberto Carlos and Ronaldo on Sunday.

Murcia have only won four matches all season but have often been a better side than their results would suggest.

Sitting on their bench will be their coach John Toshack, a haunting reminder of better days for Real Madrid. The Welshman guided Real to the 1990 league title with a record 107 goals.

"We are really just sorting ourselves out for next season but every game since we got relegated seems to show improvement," said Toshack this week.

There is also the intimidating presence of Murcia's Jose Luis Acari, whose battle with England captain David Beckham was a feature of their first encounter this season when they went down 1-0 in the Santiago Bernabeu stadium.

"I did some terrible things to him," admitted Acari.

"But Beckham was a gentleman. After the match he said they were only minor incidents," added the Murcia midfielder who, almost inevitably given Beckham's ill-starred history with the nation, is Argentine.

Barcelona are third but only one point behind their bitter rivals Real, and will be looking to increase the pressure with a win over relegation-threatened Racing Santander on Sunday.

Ronaldinho looks set to play despite a bout of flu' earlier this week but Edgar Davids is doubtful

in Europe's top leagues.

Development programmes initiated by UEFA, the European confederation, have helped African clubs, players and referees and FIFA's various assistance programmes are also helping to advance the African game.

South Africa go into Saturday's vote as the slight favourites to win the nomination, but Morocco and Egypt are not far behind and could yet take the prize.

Pele might have been wrong about an African team winning the World Cup by the year 2000 -- but perhaps only by a few years.

Africa has already won the 2010 World Cup in one way -- and by the time it is finished who's to say that there won't be an African world champion on the field too.

FIXTURES

Table of football fixtures for Saturday (Kick off GMT) and Sunday, listing teams and scores.

Wake up Liverpool



AFP, Liverpool

Steven Gerrard has warned that Liverpool must spend big this summer if they are to become a European force once more, regardless of who wins the battle to secure a major stake in the club.

The club captain refused to be drawn on the respective merits of rival cash-injection proposals from millionaire builder Steve Morgan and Thai PM Thaksin Shinawatra.

But he was more forthcoming about Liverpool's need for an injection of quality on the pitch to make an impact in the Champions League and improve on this season's fourth-place finish in the Premiership.

"The next two months are probably the most important in the recent history of the club, so far as I'm concerned," Gerrard said.

"There are a lot of things happening and it's vital we bring the right players in so we're challenging next season. Personally, I will be very disappointed if we don't sign more than three top class players in the summer."

Liverpool are already committed

Sharma plunders

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BASHUNDHARA Sandeep not out 105 Nafees Iw b Samsul 20 Al-Shahriar not out 59 Extras: (lb-2, nb-4, w-9) 15 Total: (for one in 36.4 overs) 199 Fall of wickets: 1-66

Bowlers O M R W Mizanur 4 0 21 0 Azad 5 0 28 0 Rezaunul 1 0 10 0 Shamsul 8 0 32 1 Mehru 10 0 37 0 Hasu 2.4 0 24 0 Rafiqui 4 0 33 0 Tariq 2 0 12 0

Result: Bashundhara won by nine wickets.

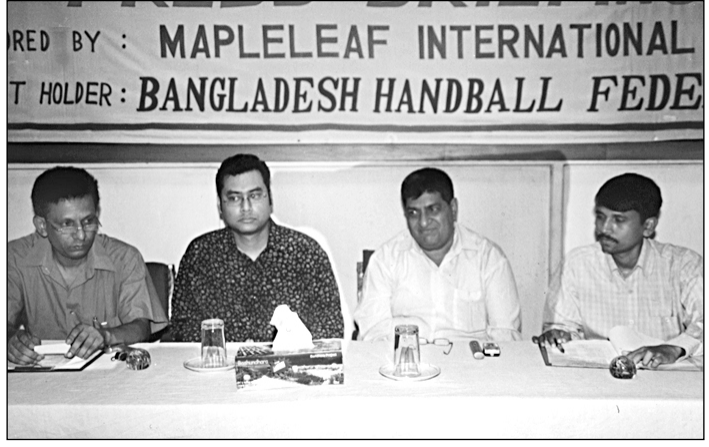
PREMIERSHIP FIXTURES

AFP, London

Table of Premier League fixtures for Saturday (1400 GMT), listing teams and venues.

FIXTURES

(All matches kick-off at 1300 GMT) AC Milan v Brescia, Chievo v Bologna, Empoli v Inter Milan, Lazio v Modena, Lecce v Reggina, Parma v Udinese, Perugia v Ancona, Sampdoria v Roma, Siena v Juventus



Bangladesh Handball Federation general secretary Asaduzzaman Kohinor (L) briefs the reporters at a press conference at the BHF office yesterday.

CRYPTOQUIP

X ROYXOLO SCO BESO GHO ICHEYG UIJ SCO REBJ XD CO PUQSI SH CULO U YXSSYO DUPO

Saturday's Cryptoquip: THE ORCHESTRA HAD A BIG PROBLEM READING THE MUSIC. IT WAS THROWING TEMPO TANTRUMS.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: S equals T

The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.