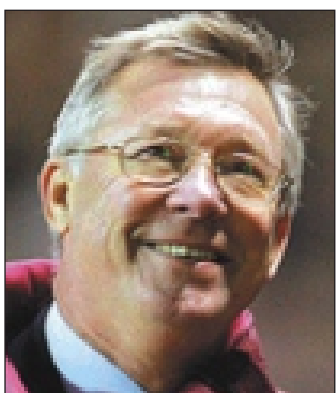




Did U Know?

Inzamamul Haq's 19th duck in 336 matches is his fourth in 34 matches against Australia. He now shares the second spot with regard to most ducks for Pakistan. Wasim Akram holds the record for most ducks for Pakistan (28).



Sir Alex Ferguson

(Man United manager)
"It is a tribute to every player involved in the game. They raised the bar and in doing so produced what might have been the best game the Premiership has ever seen. It was the kind of match you just didn't want to end."
Describing the thrilling 4-2 win over English Premier League champions Arsenal.



ESPN

English Premier League
Southampton v Everton
Taped version at 12.30 pm
ICC Cricket World
Repeated at 8 pm
Sportscentre
Live at 8.30 pm
English Premier League
Chelsea v Man City
Repeated at 9 pm

STAR Sports

Hitz
Cricket programme
Repeated at 12.45 pm
Super Centuries
Cricket programme
Repeated at 6.30 pm
Sportsline
Live at 8 pm



Ispahani 6th Nat'l Cricket League
Dhaka v Sylhet
Venue: BNS
Rajshahi v Chittagong
Venue: Bogra
Khulna v Barisal
Venue: KDS

FIRST DIV. CRICKET Kalabagan, Sonargaon stay in contention

SPORTS REPORTER

Sonargaon Cricketers and Kalabagan KC joined Gazi Tank and Surjo Torun on top of the First Division Cricket League table after winning their respective matches yesterday.

Sonargaon Cricketers (222) registered a 96-run victory over Azad Sporting Club (126) at the BKSP while Kalabagan (120-1) stormed to a nine-wicket win against Eskaton Sabuj Sangha also at the sports institute.

With ten wins each, all the four teams are now level on 20 points after 13 matches.

In other games, Rupali Bank (280) defeated Nabin Sangha (249) by 31 runs at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium while Lalmatia Club (244) edged Young Pegasus B (231) by 13 runs at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium.

NCL of hope



SPORTS REPORTER

The Ispahani Sixth National Cricket League (NCL) begins today with the promise of creating more competitiveness and excitement after the somnolent first five editions of the country's lone first-class competition.

The national selectors have done their part in approving balanced rosters for the six divisional teams and the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has guaranteed green-top tracks.

The League starts at three different venues across the country. Defending champions Dhaka will host an unhappy Sylhet at the Bangabandhu National Stadium, Rajshahi face Chittagong at the Shahid Chandu Stadium in Bogra while Khulna take on Barisal at the Khulna Divisional Stadium in the four-day fixtures which will be followed by limited-overs games.

Sylhet, clearly unhappy seeing as many as six guest players enforced on them by the selectors in the 20-member squad, appealed to the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) and won half the battle after Sadequr Rahman Tajim was included in the squad.

"Our local boy Imtiaz Hossain played brilliant cricket last year and Tajim is also a promising young player who were ignored by the selectors," said Mahbubur Rahman, secretary of Sylhet Divisional Sports Association.

Mahbubur also hit back at the critics who claimed Sylhet do not have 11 home grown players good enough to play in the National League.

"Alok Kapali and Tapash Baisya are products of the National League. So, it is unwise to say that we lack quality players," said Mahabubur.

But chief selector Faruque Ahmed defended the inclusion of six guest players to the Sylhet team.

"We did not think about individuals. We have focused only on improving the competitiveness of the event and that is why we have tried to balance the strength of the teams," he explained.

Faruque however said that they allowed Tajim as a replacement for injured national cricketer Rajin Saleh while Neeyamur Rashid will now play for his original side Dhaka.

Meanwhile, other teams faced different kinds of problems after the organisers decided to start the League with a four-day match instead of the originally scheduled one-dayer.

Akram Khan, who was set to

lead Chittagong against Khaled Mashud's Rajshahi at Bogra, had to return to Dhaka from Tangail after hearing the last minute change.

"I have decided not to play the four-dayers unless it is needed. That's why I had to return from Tangail," said the former national captain adding that he would only play the longer version when most of his players leave for India to participate in Duleep Trophy later this month.

Khulna will also be without their captain Habibul Bashar. The Bangladesh skipper has decided to rest due to injured toes. Left-arm pacer Manjurul Islam will stand in as skipper against Barisal.

Sylhet -- led by Parvez Ahmed -- will miss leading batsman Rajin. Dhaka will also be without the country's leading spinners Mohammad Rafique and Naimur Rahman as both were nursing injuries.

"Naimur is not going to play but we are still waiting on Rafique's fitness but it appears that he will miss tomorrow's match," said Dhaka captain Khaled Mahmud yesterday.

"We think we have the team to win both the four-day and one-day competitions although ours is a young side," said the all-rounder.



PHOTO: STAR

Ali Behrouze Ispahani, chairman of the sponsors Ispahani Group of Companies, addresses a press briefing in connection with the Sixth National Cricket League at a local hotel yesterday. Bangladesh Cricket Board's marketing committee chairman Aziz Al Kaiser (L) and chief national selector Faruque Ahmed (R) are also seen.

Green-tops with an eye on England



SPORTS REPORTER

With a trying tour of England coming up for the national side in May, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has decided to offer green-top pitches in the sixth version of the Ispahani Tea National Cricket League (NCL) to help the players prepare for the challenge ahead.

The NCL, the only first class competition of the country, begins today with four-day matches at three different venues across the country.

"We believe the wicket is a

crucial factor in improving the standard of our cricket. Our national team's next assignment is in England and that's why we have decided to play the league on grassy seaming tracks. Except for the venues at Barisal and Sylhet, all the other grounds will have real green-top pitches," said chief national selector Faruque Ahmed at a press briefing yesterday.

The organisers made a last moment change in the format.

"The four-day matches will be followed by a one-dayer in the first round and it will be reversed in round two," said Ali Asif Khan, vice-chairman of the BCB's cricket operations committee. Earlier, it

was announced that the limited over match would be held before the four-dayer.

A team will get maximum six points for outright victory in the four-day games while in the drawn matches four points will be awarded to the team taking a first-innings lead. Points will be shared in the case of a tie. Winners of the one-dayers will receive two points.

Faruque believed that the involvement of the selection committee in the selection process of the six divisional teams of the NCL would make the tournament more competitive this time.

"The overall standard of the

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PHOTO: AFP

South African fast bowler Makhaya Ntini (C) celebrates taking a wicket with teammates during the fourth ODI against England at Cape Town on February 6.

Disappointing BD A

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh A team were dismissed for 142 against the United Arab Emirates in their fourth and final one day match in Sharjah yesterday.

The second string Bangladesh side, who lead the series 3-0, slumped from 93-3 after 20 overs to be bundled out in 39.1 overs, according to a message received in Dhaka.

PM to give away National Sports Award on Feb 10

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia will distribute the National Sports Award 2004 to eleven sports personalities and organisers for outstanding contributions on February 10 at the International Conference Centre of the PM's office.

The recipients will receive a gold medal, Tk 20,000 in cash and a certificate.

So far, 136 sports personalities have received the award for their contribution to the country's sports.

The recipients of 2004 awards are: Mohammed Miljar Hossain (athletics), Enayetur Rahman Khan (football), Shahidur Rahman Khan (football), ASM Farooque (cricket), Mohammad Malek Chunnun (hockey), Mohammad Mahbubur Rahman (swimming), Laila Noor (swimming), Nasimul Hasan Kochi (table tennis), Khurshida Akhtar Khushi (judo), Abdul Halim (boxing) and Sadeque Hossain Khoka (organiser).

Faridpur DSA to take part in all-India hockey

BSS, Dhaka

National hockey championships runners-up Faridpur District Sports Association will take part in a tournament to be held in Chattisgarh, India, from February 15.

The Bangladesh Hockey Federation has selected the Faridpur team following an invitation by the organisers of the Mohan Raja Sarwshwar Das Memorial All-India Hockey Tournament.

Faridpur DSA have already selected 16 players and six officials for the tour.

Parag extends lead

SPORTS REPORTER

Mehdi Hasan Parag maintained solo lead in the BASIC Bank 26th National Junior (Under-20) Chess Championship at the end of the seventh round.

Parag secured maximum seven points when he beat Nahid Parvez Sagar at the federation hall-room yesterday.

Three players -- Mahtabuddin Ahmed, Golam Mostafa Bhuiyan and Shamima Akhter Liza -- followed the leader with six points each.

In the day's other 7th round matches, Mahtab beat Mahfuz, Mostafa defeated Saif, Liza beat Sharif, Ali beat Shahin and Bashir beat Saimon.

Gibbs loving No 4



CRICINFO, Cape Town

After making a superb century to put South Africa 2-1 up in the Standard Bank one-day series against England, Herschelle Gibbs expressed his desire to continue batting at number four in one-day internationals, and suggested that he would be open to moving down the order in Test cricket as well.

"It's a new position for me and I'd like to make it my own," Gibbs said after his match-winning knock of 100 at Cape Town.

"It's nice to be part of three century partnerships in the last three games and hopefully there are a few more to come. Our middle-order is still a bit inexperienced and that's obviously the reason why they

wanted me down there."

In his three innings at No. 4, Gibbs scored 78, 50 and 100, and looked fairly comfortable. Speaking about the challenges involved in the new position, Gibbs said: "It takes a different mindset to bat down there. When I go in, I have to keep the momentum going, by manipulating and manoeuvring the ball around. We know how important it is to keep the scoreboard ticking over between the 15th and 30th overs, when a team can sometimes get bogged down. So we need to bat with urgency, but not do anything stupid."

Abraham de Villiers has replaced Gibbs as Graeme Smith's opening partner in the last three one-dayers. Though De Villiers scored just 45 in three innings, Gibbs was confident that this was only a temporary blip.

"AB de Villiers has thrown a bit of a spanner in the works. He is a very

promising youngster and he deserves a run in the opening spot, though he is still finding his feet. There have been a few guys tried in the middle order and nobody has put their hand up and really made it their place."

De Villiers had an excellent Test series, scoring 362 runs - including his maiden hundred in the last match - at more than 40.

Gibbs also indicated that he might not be averse to opening in Tests.

"To be honest, though, I am very relaxed when I am waiting for my chance to bat," he said.

"Let someone else worry about facing the new ball." Speaking on that subject, Smith said:

"It is something we need to discuss. It is some time before our next Test match [against Zimbabwe

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Ganguly to start cricket academy



CRICINFO, Kolkata

Sourav Ganguly is all set to start a cricket academy in Kolkata. Press Trust of India reports that Ganguly has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to this effect with Videocon International Limited, who will sponsor the Rs 1 crore venture.

The Academy is to be called "Sourav Ganguly and Videocon School of Cricket", and will be located on a five-acre plot in Salt Lake City provided by the Kolkata Metropolitan Development Authority. While Videocon will provide the infrastructure, Ganguly will lead the team of experts who will

run the show.

"We shall spare no effort to ensure that a truly world-class cricket school comes up here," said Ganguly. He indicated that while former Bengal players like Sanjay Das and his brother Snehashish Ganguly would be available in a teaching capacity, the chief coach would be someone with a good record in international cricket. "He may be a foreigner," Ganguly said, "or a famous Indian cricketer."

Buddhadev Bhattacharjee, the chief minister of West Bengal, was present to mark the signing of the MoU. "We are happy at the spontaneity shown by the corporate house in supporting the project. Such an academy is needed to further improve the standard of cricket in Bengal."

Ahmedabad rejected as Test venue

AFP Karachi

Pakistani cricket authorities said Monday they had rejected the riot-hit city of Ahmedabad as a Test venue during next month's tour of India because of safety fears.

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) said in a statement that it had "requested the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to change the second Test venue of Ahmedabad on the grounds of security".

India last month proposed the major western city -- where at least 2,000 people were killed in bloody Muslim-Hindu religious violence in 2002 -- as one of the Test venues for the tour starting later this month.

Pakistan is predominantly Muslim, as were those who died at Ahmedabad, while India is majority Hindu.

However, the PCB denied media

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PHOTO: STAR

A HUMAN CHAIN OF A DIFFERENT KIND: Cricket fans formed a human chain outside the Bangabandhu National Stadium (BNS) yesterday in protest at the government's decision to shift the game from the premier venue to the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur. The BNS has been permanently awarded to the Bangladesh Football Federation recently.