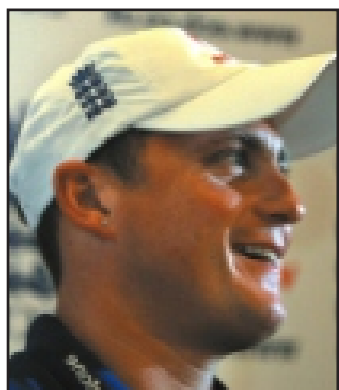




Did U Know?

Kevin Pieterston's 116 off 110 balls in the seventh and final one-day is now the highest by any batsman against South Africa at Centurion. The previous best score against South Africa at this venue was 114 by WV Raman for India in 1992-93.



Darren Gough

(England fast bowler)
 "All the players want me in the team, as does the captain and the coach. It's only critics in the media who try to write me off and all I can do is keep proving them wrong."
After a satisfying one-day series against South Africa.

The Kolkata solution?

BCCI agrees to switch Ahmedabad Test



AFP, Islamabad

India's cricket board on Thursday accepted a Pakistani request to change one Test venue but said its neighbour's first cricket tour across the border in six years may still be delayed by continuing disputes over venues and television rights.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) accepted Pakistan's demand to avoid Ahmedabad as a Test venue, but proposed the city host an unscheduled one-day international to appease local politicians and cricket officials.

The BCCI on Thursday sent a revised list of venues for the approval of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), under which the Test will shift to Kolkata and Ahmedabad is allotted one of the six one-dayers.

The PCB is expected to reply in the next 48 hours whether it is willing to consider a one-dayer in Ahmedabad, where at least 2,000 people -- mostly Muslims -- were killed in communal riots in 2002.

The tour is scheduled to start on February 25.

"There is a possibility the tour may be postponed by four to five

days," BCCI president Ranbir Singh Mahendra told reporters after a meeting of the board's working committee.

"We want everything to be in place before the tour starts."

Mohali and Bangalore will host the other two Tests during the seven-week tour, while the one-dayers will be played in Cochin, Visakhapatnam, Jamshedpur, Kanpur and New Delhi.

Only five one-dayers had been originally scheduled but a sixth was added to accommodate Ahmedabad. India's main opposition Bharatiya Janata Party last week urged the government to cancel the tour if Pakistan declines to play in Ahmedabad.

The BCCI was also unable to finalise TV rights for the high-profile series following an ongoing legal battle in the Madras High Court.

The BCCI backed out of a four-year, 308-million dollar deal with India's Zee Telefilms last September after it was challenged in court by rival ESPN-Star Sports, jointly owned by Disney and Rupert Murdoch's News Corp.

The Madras High Court, which is hearing a counter-petition by Zee, on Thursday adjourned hearings till Friday amid indications a final decision was unlikely before next week.

"We can't decide on TV rights because the matter is in court," Mahendra said.

"That's why I am saying the tour may be postponed."

Pakistan's first full tour of India since 1999 follows India's visit in March-April last year to resume cricket ties that had been stalled since 2000 due to political tensions.

India won both the Test and one-day series on that tour, their first to Pakistan for Test matches in 15 years.

Pakistan's cricket chief met visiting Indian Foreign Minister Natwar Singh earlier Thursday in Islamabad about the venue dispute, in an indication of the tour's political significance.

Pakistan Cricket Board chairman Shaharyar Khan said Singh agreed that a postponement of the tour should not be an option as both countries are willing to play.

Khan also denied reports that Pakistan had agreed to play a one-day match instead of the proposed Test.

"Our stance on not playing in Ahmedabad is based on security. Reports that the government has cleared Ahmedabad or we are ready to play a one-day match there are baseless," he said.

Nazimuddin's day



SPORTS REPORTER

Nazimuddin smashed the first double hundred of the season as his unbeaten 204 put Chittagong in the driving seat against visiting Sylhet on Day Two of their National Cricket League match yesterday.

In other fixtures, a sparkling 109 by Hasanuzzaman Rosel brought Rajshahi within seven runs of taking a first-innings lead against hosts Khulna while defending champions Dhaka were also going pretty at home against Barisal.

CHITTAGONG-SYLHET

Nazimuddin's superb knock enabled Chittagong to race to 334 for seven in their first innings at close after they had started the day on 37-1 at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium. The home side has a 118-run lead already.

Resuming on 12, number three Nazimuddin lost partners at regular intervals but did not let that deter his concentration as he single-handedly guided his team. The right-hander took 109 balls to complete his half-century but changed gears and needed a further 71 deliveries to reach his third National League ton.

By stumps, he had spent over seven hours at the crease and had faced 337 deliveries (29 fours).

Only Bangladesh discard Faisal Hossain (58 off 122 balls) provided any substantial support to Nazimuddin as the two shared 109 for the fifth wicket. Nazimuddin then partnered Mohammed Rabbi (18) for 69 runs for the seventh wicket before Sylhet picked up two wickets on 328.

Both the wickets went to left-arm spinner Nabil Samad who finished with 4-66.

Nazimuddin's one was the fifth double ton in the history of the National League. The 19-year-old will need 21 more runs to become the country's highest individual scorer in first-class cricket.

The other double centurions are Pakistan's Imran Farhat (216 v Chittagong for Bangladesh Biman),

Habibul Bashar (224 v Khulna for Bangladesh Biman), Minhazul Abedin (210 v Dhaka for Chittagong) and Hassanuzzaman of Khulna (200 v Chittagong).

KHULNA-SYLHET

At the Khulna Divisional Stadium, Rajshahi were 267 for seven following in-form Rosel's century. The home side had made 273.

Fresh from fifties in both innings in the first round, Rosel kept his composure after he had to walk in when captain Khaled Mashud retired hurt. Rajshahi at that time had already lost two early wickets.

But Rosel played his natural game and hit 15 fours and a six in 240 balls before he was lbw to

seamer Ziaur Rahman.

Khulna skipper Habibul Bashar used eight bowlers including himself but could not bowl out Rajshahi as Mashud returned to bat after tea and put on 54 runs with Rosel for the seventh wicket. Mashud was unbeaten on 34.

DHAKA-BARISAL

Dhaka scored at a much faster rate than they had done on Day One at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium.

The visitors had reached 57-1 at stumps - 298 runs behind Dhaka.

Resuming on 186-4, Dhaka lost captain Khaled Mahmud and wicketkeeper Sajjad Kadir with the

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PHOTO: ZOBAER HOSSAIN SIKDER

DOULE-UP NAZIMUDDIN: Chittagong one-down batsman Nazimuddin guiding one past point on way to an unbeaten 204 on the second day four-day Ispahani Sixth National League match against Sylhet at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium yesterday.



YOU NAUGHTY BOY! New Zealand umpire Billy Bowden (L) red cards Australian paceman Glenn McGrath for attempting to bowl underarm during the first Twenty20 match between the two Trans-Tasman rivals at Eden Park in Auckland yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Wari's worries increase

SPORTS REPORTER

Wari Club's bid to escape relegation from the First Division Cricket League suffered a big blow when they suffered a one-wicket defeat against Lalmitia Club in a last-ball thriller at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

In reply to Wari's 197-9, Lalmitia snatched victory when Setu (28) and Shafiqul (3) added 18 runs for the last-wicket partnership in four overs to reach 201-9 in exactly 50 overs.

Wari, with one match in hand, have only 10 points and must win in the remaining game to avoid relegation.

Nabin Sangha have already been demoted to the Second Division.

In other matches, a 142-run third wicket stand between Harun (92) and Zahidul (105 not out) steered Surjo Tarun (247-3) to a seven-wicket win against Young Pegasus B (245-8) at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium while Prantik KC (166-4) defeated Bangladesh Boys (163) by six wickets at the BKSP ground.

Div I hockey

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Sporting Club blanked Mukta Bihanga 2-0 in the Green Delta First Division Hockey League in yesterday's lone match at the Maulana Bhashani National Hockey Stadium.

After a barren first half, Zahid Biswas struck both goals for the winners.

Tasty starter



AFP, Auckland

Ricky Ponting and Michael Kasprovic revelled in the spotlight as Australia out-slogged and out-thought New Zealand to win their first Twenty20 cricket international by 44 runs here Thursday.

The win gives Australia a psychological advantage ahead of their tour of five one-day internationals and three Tests which starts on Saturday.

Ponting smashed an unbeaten 98 off 55 balls as the tourists averaged 10.7 runs per over to reach 214 for five in their allotted 20 overs, while New Zealand were all out on the last ball of the match for 170.

In a match which produced 384 runs in just under three hours, the crowd approaching 30,000 saw Ponting come to the crease at 21 for two and toy with the New Zealand bowlers.

He cracked eight fours and five sixes including 30 off one Daryl Tuffey over which was boosted by four sixes -- two straight down the ground and two over mid-wicket.

While cricket purists may object to this truncated new form of cricket, which encourages slogging in the 20 overs available each innings, it won sound endorsement from rival captains Ponting and Steven Fleming.

"There's obviously still a lot of work to do in terms of the marketing and where it fits into international cricket, but certainly from a players

point of view its exciting to play," Fleming said.

"You get a stage with 30,000 people you're not going to turn that away, so hopefully it's here to stay."

Man-of-the-match Ponting described the match as "Good fun... going on what we saw today I think it will be great to see more of it".

New Zealand's opening bowlers Tuffey and Kyle Mills had made a reasonable start, reducing Australia to 54 for four in the sixth over before the containment fell away.

Ponting and Simon Katich added 83 off 56 balls for the fifth wicket before Mike Hussey and Ponting put on an unbroken 77 off 34 balls. Hussey's 31 not out including three sixes.

Mills was the most successful bowler with three for 44 from four overs, and while the New Zealand figures tended to support pre-match criticism that the quickfire game would be tough on bowlers, Kasprovic thought differently when Australia were in the field.

He cleaned out both New Zealand openers in successive balls with the score at 49 -- Brendon McCullum caught by Ponting for 36 and Fleming clean bowled for 18 -- and finished with four for 29 off his four overs.

Kasprovic's victims also included Chris Cairns for one as Cairns and New Zealand's other big hitter Craig McMillan failed to fire, leaving a 66 from Scott Styris as the one respectable innings.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard in the Twenty20 limited-overs match between New Zealand

SEE PAGE 14 COL 4

First Ashes, then honeymoon

GUARDIAN, London

Andrew Flintoff is so determined to lead England's attempt to regain the Ashes this summer he has agreed to postpone his honeymoon.

The Lancashire all-rounder is recovering from an operation to remove the spur on his ankle which forced him to miss the one-day series in South Africa and he has been given a rigorous rehabilitation programme by the England and Wales Cricket Board.

According to his agent Neil Fairbrother, the former Lancashire and England batsman, the recovery schedule is so tight that he can not even afford to take a week off after his wedding which is planned for March 5.

"The ECB has given him a rehabilitation programme which is very comprehensive," Fairbrother explained.

"They'll give him a day off to get married but there's no time for a honeymoon. They'll have to make up for that later."

However, Flintoff remains firmly on course to play in his first Ashes series after missing the last tour of Australia two winters ago because of his back injury.

"The operation went well and he had the stitches out last Friday," added Fairbrother, although he refused to be drawn on a likely comeback date for the England batsman.

"It's too early to say when he'll be playing again but he's very positive about everything."

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What to WATCH

ESPN
 Bangladesh vs India
 Third ODI
 Highlights at 11:00 am
 English Premier Football League
 Blackburn Rovers vs Norwich City
 Taped Version at 6:30 pm
Sportscentre
 Live at 8:30 pm
STAR Sports
 FA Cup
 Sheffield United vs West Ham
 Taped versions at 6:30 am
Sportsline
 Live at 8:00 pm

DAY'S EVENT

Ispahani 6th Nat'l Cricket League
 (Four-day)
 Dhaka v Barisal
 Venue: FCS
 Khulna v Rajshahi
 Venue: KDS
 Chittagong v Sylhet
 Venue: CDS

Qamar flies home

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's hockey coach Qamar Ibrahim left for Pakistan yesterday after a two-week stint in Dhaka.

The former Pakistan international, who ran a week-long coaches' course during his stay, reportedly expressed his disappointment with the Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) for not giving him 'enough scope to work'.

It was also learnt that the frustrated coach had decided not to return and continue his role. However, he said that the BHF president Air-Vice Marshal Fakhrul Azam persuaded him to stay on.

Shortly before his departure, Qamar told reporters that he had a chat with the BHF chief who assured him of a full work schedule.

Qamar confirmed that he would return to Dhaka whenever the federation needed him.

Hasan loses solo lead

SPORTS REPORTER

Hasan Imam lost solo lead in the 31st National Chess Championship qualifiers when he drew with Aminul Islam in the sixth round at the federation hall-room yesterday.

Hasan, who had won the first five

SEE PAGE 14 COL 4



CRICINFO, undated

Less than a week after the ICC seemed to suggest that it was prepared to consider reducing the number of matches involving Bangladesh and Zimbabwe, Ehsan Mani, the ICC's president, has said that weaker countries need exposure if they are to develop.

An ICC spokesman had indicated to CricInfo that Bangladesh and Zimbabwe could be limited to home appearances only across a six-year cycle, as part of a two-tier system to combat the twin problems of fixture overload and uncompetitive matches.

"To talk about a two-tier system, I think, is wrong," Mani told the Indo-

Asian News Service during a visit to India earlier this week. Rather than segregate the two countries, he argued that the ICC should "actually find positive ways of helping them."

"We have Australia on top and then you have seven other countries that are quite close. There is not much difference in Test or one-day cricket between the No. 2 and the No. 8 countries ... and, yes, there is a big drop [to Bangladesh and Zimbabwe]. What is important for us is to help these countries and not marginalise them."

The ICC is thought to be coming under pressure from some of the top eight countries who see often one-sided series against the weakest team as an unnecessary burden on their players as well as being commercially unattractive. But Mani made clear his view was that once a

member, always a member.

"If weaker teams have a problem," he argued.

"It's the problem of international cricket community, and we have to find the ways of helping them."

But Mani did agree that there were issues over international scheduling which would be addressed when the ICC meet in New Delhi next month.

"We are looking at the whole way we are running world cricket, whether the 10-year plan is the right programme, or whether it should be eight years or 12 years."

One possible way of easing the situation could be playing more games in traditional off-seasons.

"If we could play in June or July in some countries -- in Zimbabwe, you can actually -- maybe we should be looking from that point of view."



Followers, well-wishers and organisers pray during a milad mahfil for late Monem Munna at the Abahani Club premises yesterday. A football icon of the country, Munna died last Saturday due to multi-organ dysfunction. He was 39.

PHOTO: STAR