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INDEPENDENCE DAY SOCCER Russel KC in final

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Sheikh Russel Kriya Chakra's Moroccan connection paid rich dividends as the Dhaka Premier League runner-up cruised to the final of the Independence Day football tournament with a 3-0 win over Arambagh Kriya Sangha here at the Rajshahi Stadium yesterday.

All three Moroccan imports -- Egir, Rachid and Adel -- scored in the first semifinal for Russel, who will meet winners of today's semi-final between Abahani and Muktiyoddha in the May 12 final.

Russel put on an attacking show from the start before a 15,000-strong crowd and skipper Egir opened the account in the 24th minute with a powerful header on a centre by Tanveer whose constant runs down the left wing put their Dhaka rivals under constant threat.

Rachid doubled the lead just one minute before the interval with a pass from Adel who sealed the

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Malik in the clear

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan's promising off-spinning allrounder Shoaib Malik has been cleared of suspected bowling action, a Pakistan cricket official said Monday.

"Malik went to the sports institute of South Africa last month and now we have received the report which says that he is bowling within the tolerance level of 15 degrees," Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) director Salim Altaf told AFP.

"After his action was questioned, we did some remedial work on it and he bowled in four one-day matches in India and was not reported," said Altaf.

The report clearing Malik of suspected action was sent to the International Cricket Council (ICC) as a normal procedure, Altaf said.

Malik's bowling was reported as suspect by ICC match referee Jeff Crowe of New Zealand for a second time in October last year.

Malik, 23, was reported for the first time in 2002.

The ICC rules now allow a bowler to straighten his arm by 15 degrees but once a bowler's action is questioned it is mandatory for him to

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Did U Know?

The first player to score 100 runs and take 10 wickets in the same Test was Australia's Alan Davidson in 1960.



Talk Turkey



Massimo Ambrosini

(AC Milan midfielder)
"In football, you cannot dwell on the past, you must always look to the future."



What to Watch

ESPN
Football Focus
Live at 8:30 pm
Sportscentre
Live at 8:30 pm

STAR Sports
ATP Hamburg Masters
First Round
Live at 9:30 pm

English Premier Football League
Man United vs Chelsea
Live at 12:55 am (Wednesday)

Bashar & co open Eng tour today

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will field a full strength side when they play their tour opener against British Universities today.

The Tigers, who reached London on Saturday to mark their first full series in England, have reportedly decided to put all their key weapons on display in the three-day match at the Fenner's ground at Cambridge for two reasons. Firstly, to quickly adjust to the alien conditions and secondly to make their presence felt in the British media, which has so far been rather indifferent to the arrival of the Test babes.

"We want to make a good start to the tour and it is always important to

give match practice for the team's vital players. Actually the team is desperately looking to make a good impression in the first match," said chief selector Faruque Ahmed while confirming that no key players including wicketkeeper Khaled Mashud would be rested.

Faruque, who had a long discussion with coach Dav Whatmore and skipper Habibul Bashar over phone, said that young fast bowler Shahadat Hossain might be the only player among the three new faces in the team to win a place in the playing eleven.

The former Bangladesh captain said that there was a strong possibility of fielding three pacers Mashrafe-Bin-Mortuza, Tapash Baisya and Shahadat along with two spinners Mohammad Rafique and Enamul Haque.

The only bad news is that top-order batsman Aftab Ahmed, who is running fever, might miss the game.

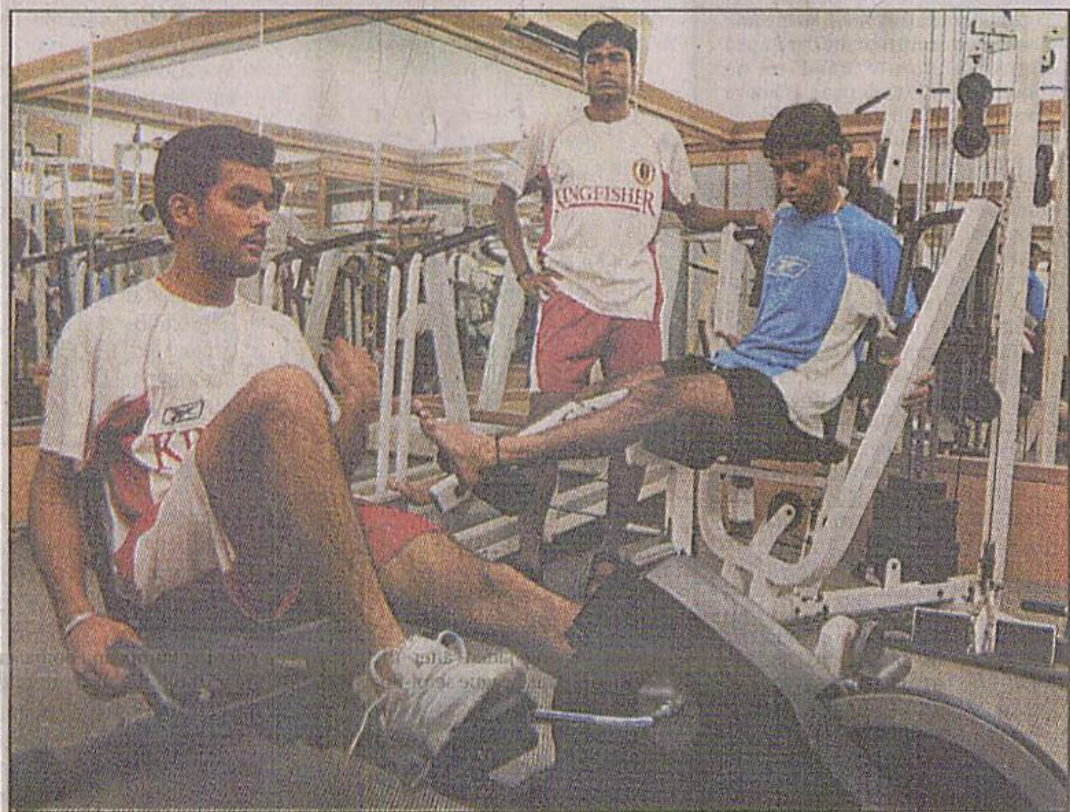
"He (Aftab) has been suffering from fever and has hardly any chance to play the match," Faruque informed.

The other worry for Bangladesh was that the typical English rain has returned on Monday after two bright sunny days.

"It's very cold out there today. Still, we enjoyed a wonderful training session at the beautiful Fenner's ground," said Khaled Mashud over phone. The experienced wicketkeeper said that everybody including himself was excited to play in England.

Bangladesh will play two more, three-day warm-up matches, against Sussex on May 15-17 and

SEE PAGE 13 COL 5



East Bengal players Dipankar Roy (L) and Gurpreet Singh (R) work out at the gym while Habibur Rahman Mondal looks on at Hotel La Vinci in the city on Monday.

Depleted East Bengal in city

SPORTS REPORTER

A 23-member East Bengal football team arrived in Dhaka yesterday to play their AFC Cup Group-A tie against Muktiyoddha Sangsad.

The match, fifth for both sides in the competition, will be played at the Bangabandhu National Stadium tomorrow at 5:30pm. It was originally scheduled for a 4pm start but in response to the host team's request to hold the game under lights, the Asian Football Federation (AFF) gave Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) the permission to delay the kick off by an hour and a half.

Both the teams are out of contention for a berth in the next phase.

East Bengal, who are struggling in domestic and international

fronts this season, have brought an under-strength squad to Dhaka including prized possession Baichung Bhutia who is not eligible for the game following two yellow cards. The Kolkata side did not practice on Monday and did some stretching at their hotel gymnasium.

Only one of their foreign recruits, Nigerian striker Jeremiah, has made the Dhaka trip. Their lineup also consists four national booters.

"We could not bring our full strength squad as we are missing at least four of our starting players due to injury and suspension. Also, there is hardly any interest left for us in the tournament. But this match is still a prestige battle," said manager Swapan Kumar yesterday.

East Bengal, who drew their home match against the Dhaka Reds in the opening round of the competition

Coach Subhash Bhowmik was

due to reach Dhaka yesterday evening.

Bottom of the table East Bengal have lost all their matches other than the draw in the first match. Muktiyoddha are third in the table with four points.

Muktiyoddha have not done well in their AFC Cup home matches losing both their encounters to group leaders Al Faysaly of Jordan and Turkmenistan's Nebitchi. But they have not lost an away match. Their only win in the competition came against Nebitchi.

EAST BENGAL SQUAD: Rajat Ghosh, M Suresh, Climax Lawrence, Bijen Singh, Nitin Pradhan, Gurpreet Singh, Habibur Rahman Mondal, Bhola Prasad, Malswan Tulanga, Subhash Chakraborty, Rahim Nabi, EC Jeremiah, Madhab Das, Sudeep Das, Surya Chakra-bory, Dipankar Roy, Chandan Das, Debjit Ghosh and Sangram Mukherjee.

NATIONAL TABLE TENNIS Ansar shoot Biman down

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Ansar dethroned Bangladesh Biman as women's national champions with a 3-0 win in the team event final of the Meril 27th National Table Tennis Championships at the Shaheed Suhrawardy National Indoor Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Last year's losing finalists Ansars took sweet revenge with Soma beating Biman's Rumi 8-11, 14-12, 16-14, 4-11, 11-8 in a keenly contested first singles before Saleha registered a cakewalk (11-6, 11-4, 11-9) over Ratna.

Soma and Saleha then paired to win the doubles 11-8, 11-4, 11-7 over Rumi and Ratna.

Earlier in the semis, Ansars blanked Rajshahi 3-0 while Biman also beat Gaibandha in straight sets.

BFF allows three foreign recruits

SPORTS REPORTER

Traditional heavyweights Abahani and Mohammedan, who have been largely feeling the weight of new powers Brothers Union and Muktiyoddha Sangsad, won a small battle of the field when the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) revised the foreign players' quota for this season's Dhaka Premier Division football league.

Having failed to land a single trophy last year, both Abahani and Mohammedan have become mere spectators this season also as Brothers and Muktiyoddha shared titles of the first two tournaments.

Desperate to survive in the domestic scene, both the clubs appealed to the BFF to increase the foreign quota from two players. Another emerging power, last season's runners up Sheikh Russel KC, supported their appeal.

Brothers and Muktiyoddha, who have the best collection of home-grown players, were against the idea but the BFF executive committee meeting yesterday supported the move by 15-3 votes.

"We could not reach a unanimous decision. So it was open and most of the clubs voted for more foreign players," said BFF general

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High Commissioner receives Tigers at Heathrow

The press wing of the Bangladesh High Commission in the United Kingdom has sent the following press release on the arrival and reception of the Bangladesh cricket team at London's Heathrow Airport on May 7. The Tigers are in England for their first ever full Test tour to that country.

The Bangladesh cricket team arrived at London's Heathrow airport yesterday (May 7, Saturday), morning to a warm and enthusiastic welcome. High Commissioner A H Mofazzal Karim led the welcoming party which consisted of a large number of expatriate Bangladeshis.

They received the players and team officials with flowers and welcoming slogans. To record the arrival and reception were media persons from the British media, both English-language and Bangla, including photographers and TV reporters.

Though the team members, led by captain Habibul Bashar, were tired after the long flight from Dhaka, they were cheerful and happy seeing the spirited welcoming party. After the photo-sessions, the players left for their hotel accompanied by team officials as well as officers from the High Commission.

Aside from the cricket enthusiasts, present at Heathrow to welcome the cricketers and assist them were the minister for press Fazal Kamal, minister for consular affairs MA Salam, councillor Shabbir Chowdhury and protocol officers of the High Commission.

Amarnath keen on coaching India

PTI, Mumbai

Former Test cricketer and 1983 World Cup winning member Mohinder Amarnath on Monday said he was interested in taking up the post of the national team's coach and he had enough time to do justice to the responsibility.

"I am certainly interested in the job and have the time to devote to it, otherwise I would not have evinced my interest," said Amarnath, who was one of the four persons to be shortlisted by a panel.

"I had not applied for the post, but merely indicated my interest through the media," said Amarnath who retired from international cricket in 1988.



Bangladesh Ansar pair Sonam Sultana (R) and Saleha Parveen in action in the women's team final of the Meril 27th National Table Tennis Championships at the Suhrawardy National Indoor Stadium in Mirpur on Monday.

'Winning not everything'

Cricket

AFP, Cambridge

Bangladesh coach Dav Whatmore has insisted the success of the Asian side's tour of England is not simply a matter of results.

One of world cricket's weakest Test teams, Bangladesh begin a two-Test series against England later this month before taking part in a triangular one-day tournament with the hosts and world champions Australia.

Bad weather apart, Bangladesh will be odds-on favourites to lose all their international games in England, hardly surprising given they have been beaten in 31 out of their 36 Tests with just one win and four draws.

But Whatmore, speaking here Monday, ahead of the tourists' opening match against British Universities at Fenner's, said: "Success or otherwise is certainly not measured in the scoreline."

"It is measured in other areas; there will be objectives both for individuals and the team as well."

"Essentially we want to show

progress and push the opposition as hard as we can," Whatmore, who guided Sri Lanka to the 1996 World Cup, added.

"Playing on the fifth day of Test matches is very much an objective."

"Being the underdogs is a reality, it is a huge challenge but along the way we have already managed to have some good times. That is probably the best tonic you can get as a coach with a developing team."

In January, Bangladesh won their first Test series, albeit against fellow strugglers Zimbabwe, and then came back from 2-0 down to win the five-match one-day series against the Africans.

Their progress may have been enough to persuade Whatmore to sign a new two-year deal with Bangladesh even though there had been speculation he was in the running to succeed New Zealand coach John Wright as coach of India.

And with the average age of the 16-man squad only 22, Whatmore is convinced the future is bright for Bangladesh.

"These (English) conditions are totally different but at the same time our team is just realising the opposi-

tion is the same as us, with two arms and two legs," he said.

"We have three or four (players) who in time will be stars, the difference between the two teams now is that other teams have stars, most teams we play against have big match winners and we are in the process of creating those."

Among the rising stars is 21-year-old fast bowler Mashrafe-bin-Mortuza, who impressed during England's 2003-04 tour and has overcome the pain of knee reconstructions in both legs.

And Whatmore said Mashrafe should have been included in the world squad for the Super Series matches against Australia in October.

"I was really hoping he might be in that group," added Whatmore, a former Australian Test player. "I may be biased but the boy can play."

"It would have been a huge boost for him, he comes from a team which is developing and it would have been a real shot in the arm and have helped the whole country along to have someone represented."

Bangladesh's first Test against England starts at Lord's on May 26.

All-star World XI Ganguly ignored, Akhtar picked

Cricket

AFP, Mumbai

India captain Sourav Ganguly failed to make it to the International Cricket Council's (ICC) initial Rest of the World squads announced Monday for the Super Series in Australia later this year.

Ganguly, who has led his team to a record 19 Test wins, was not named in the squads of 30 each announced by chief selector Sunil Gavaskar because of a poor recent run in international cricket.

The ICC Rest of the World XIs are scheduled to take on world champions Australia in three one-dayers (October 5, 7 and 9) in Melbourne and a six-day Test in Sydney (October 14 to 19) which have been accorded official status.

Pakistan, who drew a recent three-Test series in India 1-1 before winning a six-match one-day series 4-2, were rewarded as nine players found their way to either the Test or one-day squad.

Speedster Shoaib Akhtar, ignored for Pakistan's upcoming tour of the West Indies, was included in both squads along with captain Inzamamul Haq and seamer Navedul Hasan.

A total of 21 players are common in both squads with India and South Africa having five each in both lists and seven in all for the Tests.

"The squads are packed with talented players from around the world who will pose a serious challenge to Australia's supremacy in both forms of the game," said Gavaskar, a former India skipper.

ICC chief executive Malcolm Speed said the selectors were doing a good job.

"There is awesome depth to the batting strength of these squads, with players like Dravid, Lara, Laxman, Sehwag, Tendulkar and Vaughan all averaging over 50 in Tests against Australia," he said.

"It is also particularly exciting to see the names of a number of younger and emerging players recognised by the selectors."

No player from Bangladesh, Zimbabwe or Kenya was picked.

The selection panel comprising Gavaskar, Mike Atherton, Richard Hadlee, Clive Lloyd, Jonty Rhodes and Aravinda de Silva will shortlist the squads to 20 each in July before announcing the final teams in August.

INITIAL TEST SQUAD

Rahul Dravid, Sachin Tendulkar, Irfan Pathan, Virender Sehwag, Harbhajan Singh, Venkatesai Laxman, Anil Kumble (India); Andrew Flintoff, Michael Vaughan, Andrew Strauss, Steve Harmison (England); Brendon McCullum, Daniel Vettori (New Zealand); Inzamamul Haq, Shoaib Akhtar, Navedul Hasan, Younis Khan, Danish Kaneria (Pakistan); Mark Boucher, Herschelle Gibbs, Jacques

Kallis, Makhaya Ntini, Shaun Pollock, Graeme Smith, Andre Nel (South Africa); Muttiah Muralitharan, Kumar Sangakkara, Chaminda Vaas (Sri Lanka); Brian Lara, Ramnarresh Sarwan (West Indies).

INITIAL ONE-DAY SQUAD

Dravid, Tendulkar, Pathan, Sehwag, Harbhajan (India); Flintoff, Marcus Trescothick, Kevin Pietersen, Darren Gough (England); McCullum, Vettori (New Zealand); Inzamam, Akhtar, Naved, Shahid Afridi, Shoaib Malik, Abdul Razaq, Yousuf Youhana (Pakistan); Boucher, Gibbs, Kallis, Ntini, Pollock (South Africa); Sanath Jayasuriya, Muralitharan, Sangakkara, Vaas (Sri Lanka); Lara, Sarwan, Chris Gayle (West Indies).

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