

## MSC outplay Abahani

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

The battle royale in the Premier Division Cricket League turned into a mismatch when Mohammedan Sporting Club handed their bitter foes Abahani a 61-run defeat at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium on Thursday.

However, what was more disappointing about what usually is considered as a blood and thunder clash between the two crowd-pulling teams was the absence of any supporters. It was hard to believe that the match was played in front of empty stands. A few Abahani officials sitting at the VIP stand tried to console themselves by saying that the venue at Fatullah was not one of those best places for their supporters to come in good numbers. But another official said: "We have played our first game in Bogra in front of a good crowd."

The mood in the rival tent was no exception but the only solace for Mohammedan was that their boys simply outclassed Abahani and exacted a sweet revenge of their defeat last year.

The match was a contest as all but over when Abahani, chasing an impressive Mohammedan total of 245, were seven wickets down with 143 runs on the board and eight more overs remaining.

Earlier, Indian Sandeep Sharma smashed 60 and Bangladesh vice-captain Khaled Masud chipped in with an unbeaten 49 as Mohammedan recovered from early hiccup to amass a commanding total.

The mediocre Abahani batting line-up was never up in their chase and their dream to make a match out of it was effectively dashed when

their former Pakistani Test batsman Shadab Kabir was out for 14. Shadab flicked a ranked long hop from Sandeep but was caught by Monju at deep fine leg.

Left-handed batsman Faisal Hossain was the top scorer with a 79-ball 47 while number eight Ahsanullah Hasan added 34 just to close the margin of defeat. Faisal offered a tame return catch to off-spinner Shabbir Khan.

It was Mohammedan's second successive victory to join defending champions Old DOHS, Victoria Sporting Club and Brothers Union at the top spot. DOHS, Brothers and Victoria also picked up their second successive victories. Debutant Sonargaon Cricketers and Bangladesh Biman also won their respective games after the first-match disappointment.

Brothers, fresh from their five-wicket win against Biman, floored last year runners-up City Club at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium. The margin of victory for the Gopibagh outfit was 74 runs.

Brothers never looked behind after Gazi Salahuddin (44) and Rashedul Haque (52) put on 104 runs for the opening stand.

Brothers, who finished ninth last season, scored a challenging 244-9 with their captain Ehsanul Haque making a 53-ball 46 coming into bat at number four.

Two national batsmen Rajin Saleh (24) and Shahrir Nafees (47) also gave City a solid start producing 74 runs for the opening stand but the new town outfit suffered a stunning slide, losing six wickets for 37 runs from there they never recovered.

Former Zimbabwe captain Tatenda Taibu was a disappointment again. He scored only one for City after a mere 14 on his Dhaka debut against Kalabagan on Monday.

The spinning trio of Enamul

Haque, Arafat Sunny and Pakistani Rashed Hanif destroyed City, who eventually finished on 170-9.

At the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogra, Kenyan Steve Tikolo guided Old DOHS to a 59-run victory over promotes Kalabagan.

The right-hander, who struck 70 against Sonargaon in the first

match, smashed a 71-ball 56 and opener Nazimuddin made 65 as DOHS posted 229 before being all out in 49.3 overs.

Tikolo then picked up four wickets for 19 runs to dismiss Kalabagan for 170 in 40.4 overs.

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Mohammedan's Indian recruit Sandeep Sharma works the ball on the on-side on way to scoring a solid 60 against archrivals Abahani during their Premier Cricket League encounter at Fatullah on Thursday.

PHOTO: STAR

## BCB keeps same side for U-19 Cricket WC

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) announced a 14-member Bangladesh under-19 squad yesterday that will take part in the ICC Under-19 World Cup to be held in Sri Lanka in February.

The Faruque Ahmed-led national selection panel kept hope in the same squad which had triumphed in the just completed tri-nation tournament involving runners-up Sri Lanka and England.

Test cap Mushfiqur Rahim has been retained as captain and Mehrab Hossain as his deputy.

The selected players, who have been asked to report at BKSP on December 18, will only be released to play in the ongoing Premier Division Cricket League on December 23.

Meanwhile, Mazhar Uddin, Marshall Ayub, Farhad Hossain and Nazmul Hossain have been named as stand-by and they will be allowed to play in the League.

### SQUAD

Mushfiqur Rahim (captain), Mehrab Hossain (vice-captain), Sohrwardi Shuvo, Mehdi Hasan, Raqibul Hasan, Shamsur Rahman, Rezaul Islam, Kamrul Islam, Sakib-al-Hasan, Tamim Iqbal, Nabil Samad, Dolar Mahmud, Ishraq Sonnet and Sirajullah Khadem.

## SA Games delayed

SPORTS REPORTER

The 10th South Asian Games have been deferred by four months as the region's biggest sports extravaganza will now be held in Colombo over August 18 to 27 instead of April 18-28.

The decision was taken in an executive committee meeting of the South Asian Olympic Council in Bhutan on December 10.

The meeting has also decided to include hockey and allow women to take part in four more events -- cycling, taekwondo, kabaddi and 10,000m marathon.

## WB fuming

AFP, Kolkata

Angry cricket fans in the eastern Indian state of West Bengal (WB) protested Thursday at the axing of former captain Sourav Ganguly for the third and final Test against Sri Lanka.

Protesters blocked roads and rail tracks at several places in Ganguly's home town of Kolkata and other districts of the state, police said.

Ignoring political or other differences, hundreds of people rallied behind Ganguly, condemning the "injustice" done to the batsman.

Ganguly, India's most successful captain with 21 Test wins, was dropped Wednesday from the squad for the third and final Test against the visiting team starting at Ahmedabad on Sunday.

Effigies of Indian coach Greg Chappell and chief selector Kiran More were burnt and their pictures were garlanded with shoes in Esplanade, a business hub, and elsewhere in the city, city deputy commissioner Anuj Sharma said.

Protesters marched chanting slogans, "We want Sourav back" and "Chappell, More go to hell".

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## Booters aim to break the final jinx against India

AL MUSABBIR SADI from Karachi



There were instant celebrations as soon as Bangladesh won the second semifinal against hosts Pakistan at the People's Sports Complex Stadium on Wednesday. But when the boys of Diego Cruciani came out of the dressing room after having a nice shower they announced that they were holding back the party till the final against India on December 17.

Although Bangladesh enjoyed the night at an official dinner hosted by the Pakistan Football Federation at the Beach Luxury Hotel, they stuck to the coach's strict instructions to avoid any spiciness.

Back at the team hotel, they were more focused about the one last fight against India, who never lost to Bangladesh in any regional football final.

India won the SAF Games final in 1985 and 1995 against Bangladesh. They also lifted the inaugural SAFF Championship in 1999.

"Against India it would be a game of nerves. We have to play our normal game if we are to win the final," said ace striker Alfaz Ahmed, who slammed the match winner against hosts Nepal as Bangladesh lifted their first trophy in regional

football at the 1999 SAF Games. "I would be the happiest man if my goal brings another trophy for the country," said the veteran, who has slowed down over the years and also finds it difficult to cope with the pressure-game for full 90 minutes.

"I have been playing as a striker for long. The new coach has set me as a free midfielder. It needs hard work and more stamina. But I have taken the challenge of attacking as well as running behind to defend. I don't have any partner in this new formation and may be working alone tires me. I am happy that the coach still relies on me for this key position."

"I love scoring goals but as one of the senior players of the side, I have to perform the duty that has been put on me. It's a team game and I cannot disturb the flow by trying to satisfy my own desires."

Another key player Rajani, who was outstanding in the semifinal against Pakistan, has never featured in Bangladesh's two triumphs, in 1999 and in the 2003 SAFF Championship at home for suspension.

"I was on a yellow card and I was very cautious. I never wanted to miss the show again. My wife (Mousumi Barman Pinky) who lives in Kolkata called me and said that we have to beat India. I feel Baichung Bhutia would be the man I have to mark. If I am successful, we will win the trophy," said a confident

Rajani. Striker Farhad scored the first two goals for Bangladesh in the meet and felt that Pakistan were at their best against Bangladesh in the semis.

"They used the advantage of their height and we toiled hard. I know we drew the group-match with India but you can't compare it with the final. It would be a different ball game," the shaven-headed forward said.

His striking partner Kanchan was also cautious after starting the game on one booking. "I did not want to miss out. We need our full strength to beat India and having ousted a strong Pakistan, I feel that we have the ability to do that," said Kanchan, who fired twice in Bangladesh's 2-0 defeat of Nepal.

Parvez Babu, who replaced Titu in the semis after the fullback -- having earned a penalty -- had to retire for back pain, said that unity, planning, speed and tips from coach are being reflected in Bangladesh's game. "We can give back the goals now, we can hold even a slim lead which was not the case in our football in the past. We have to maintain this flow in the final as well."

According to second-choice goalkeeper Biplab, hero of Bangladesh's 1999 SAF Games,

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## Akmal scripts big Pak win

Cricket

AFP, Karachi

Kamran Akmal smashed his second successive one-day century to help Pakistan hand England a crushing 165-run defeat in the third day-night limited-overs international here on Thursday.

Akmal followed his 102 in the second match with a brilliant 109 and all-rounder Abdul Razzaq hit an unbeaten 22-ball 51 as England conceded their highest-ever one-day total of 353-6 in 50 overs.

England never looked remotely in the hunt and lost wickets at regular

intervals. They were dismissed for 188 in 42 overs, with supersub Ian Bell topscoring with 37 not out.

Pakistan lead the five-match series 2-1.

The result equalled England's previous worst one-day defeat of 165 suffered against the West Indies at St. Vincent in the 1993-94 series.

The tourists lost opener Matthew Prior (two) to a run out in the seventh over when fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar picked up Marcus Trescothick's drive and threw the stumps down at the non-striker's end.

Navedul Hasan then removed Trescothick (22) and Vikram Solanki (nought) in his fourth over to leave England struggling on 40-3.

It became 4-79 when Mohammad Sami trapped Andrew Strauss leg before for 23. All-rounder Andrew Flintoff hit seven boundaries in his 36 before he was bowled by supersub Yasir Arafat.

Leg-spinner Shahid Afridi and Shoaib Malik then shared five wickets between them to wrap up the innings on a day totally dominated by Pakistan.

Earlier, Akmal had added 104 for the third wicket with Mohammad Yousuf (68) after Trescothick surprisingly put them in on a pitch full of runs.

The 22-year-old, whose century helped Pakistan win Monday's

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MAN-OF-THE-MATCH: Pakistan opener Kamran Akmal pulls one for four during his 109 in the third ODI against England at the Karachi National Stadium on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP



## 'Self-pressure is self-help'

Football

AL MUSABBIR SADI from Karachi

One man has kept Indian football alive in the last decade and he has been the undisputed superstar of South Asia. Baichung Bhutia, who needs no introduction to football fans, had a stint with English Second Division Club Bury but has now settled with his old club East Bengal.

Having started his career at the top level of Kolkata soccer, the pocket size striker from Sikkim, who turned 29 on Thursday, has risen to the ranks of greats and became the only Indian booter to have played professional football in Europe. He is also the only footballer in the cricket-crazy country to draw attention from big sponsors.

Although the ongoing SAFF Championship has seen only the shadow of Baichung, his presence has inspired India's new generation footballers bring a high-flying Maldives down and make it to their third Championship final.

It was Baichung's genius, skill and amazing turns with the ball that single-handedly dashed Bangladesh's hopes to win the SAFF title in 1999 in Goa when the two rivals met for the first time in the final of the tournament.

Having played for the national side for nearly 12 years, Baichung was re-elected Indian captain for the Pakistan trip although he had a three-month lay-off from the game

due to a liver disease. A penalty-area specialist, Baichung could still surprise any opponents and with India missing a good striker as his partner, he would be the key when the two-time winners take on defending champions Bangladesh in tomorrow's final.

Talking to a group of Bangladeshi reporters following Wednesday night's dinner hosted by the



BAICHUNG BHUTIA

Pakistan Football Federation at the Beach Luxury Hotel in Karachi, Baichung said that football in this region was on the up.

"Bangladesh and India have always ruled football in South Asia. But teams like Maldives have really improved recently. Afghanistan are a new side but look how they have turned back in the tournament," opined Baichung.

"But the standard of youth devel-

opment programmes here is very low compared to Europe and other developed football nations in Asia. Federations, clubs and all football related persons have to take responsibilities for the development of the game.

"There is not enough money in the sport in the subcontinent and it is very important because it will help a lot of things. But again, money alone can't solve all the problems. Knowledge and how you implement it are more important. You have to have visions and aims. We need a combination of football-brain and money to improve our game."

"Skill is important for players but football is not only about skills. It alone can't make anything. It matters till you are 14-15 years old. Afterwards, you have to develop physically and also psychologically. You have to be positive."

"You can't blame our footballers for failing to meet the international standard. You can't expect your son to be a good doctor if you send him to a college without reputation. We have to give the players the right environment for proper grooming."

Asked whether Baichung was towards the end of an illustrious career, the 29-year-old said that he was still enjoying football.

"I will play as long as I enjoy it. The inspiration behind going on is that every game I play, I want to win and I want to score. Each game is

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Rafael Benitez

(Liverpool soccer coach)

"He is improving every year. He can play anywhere. He is so unselfish in that respect. He always thinks about the team and not about himself."

On Steven Gerrard.



### STAR Sports

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