

Preliminary nat'l camp concludes

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh national football squad concluded their four-day fitness training yesterday to gear up for the final preparation for next month's inaugural AFC Challenge Cup at home.

However, it was still uncertain whether coach Diego Cruciani's wish to spend two weeks in abroad and play at least three warm-up matches would be fulfilled or not.

The squad is expected to start residential camp at BKSP from tomorrow unless the federation confirms their trip to Thailand.

The National Team Management Committee (NTMC) was expected to sit with the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) high-ups yesterday but the meeting did not take place due to NTMC chairman Kazi Salahuddin's illness.

The BFF does not have the fund to provide training facilities abroad for preparation and BFF general secretary Anwarul Hoque Helal told yesterday that if the NTMC can arrange the trip, they will oblige.

Meanwhile, Dhaka City Mayor Sadeq Hossain Khoka and Helal have been made chairman and secretary of the AFC Challenge Cup local organising committee.



Bangladesh seamer Shahadat Hossain celebrates the dismissal of Sri Lanka batsman Kumar Sangakkara (R) on the second day of the second Test at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogra on Wednesday.

A lesson for home batsmen

BISHWAJIT ROY from Bogra



Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar wants to take lessons from Upul Tharanga before going into the second essay of the second and final Test against Sri Lanka.

The home side were yet to dismiss their opponents as the islanders rode on a masterly unbeaten 160-run by the 21-year-old Tharanga to finish the day on 302-8 but Bashar said that they have already started thinking about their second innings.

"No doubt, our first target would be to pick up the remaining wickets quickly but we are already thinking about the second innings. I think the second day was not too bad for us if you consider our first innings total. But all know that we have a very poor record in second innings," said Bashar.

Bangladesh put pressure on Sri Lanka in the first Test in Chittagong when bowlers did a tremendous job to allow Sri Lanka only a 19-run lead but the Tigers' second-innings nightmare revisited once again.

"We have already started to talk about the issue. This time we are going to play session by session rather than putting runs on board or thinking about setting a target. I have faith in my boys that they will put their best to finish the series on a high note," said a confident Bashar who vowed not to repeat the same mistakes.

"The way the young Sri Lankan carried his innings was absolutely brilliant and I think he snatched the match from us. But we can take the lesson from him about how to carry an innings as long as possible after getting settled in the middle," said Bashar, who was not ready to accept the blame for setting a defensive fielding

were struggling at 43-4 because of his conventional fielding strategy that allowed Sri Lanka captain Mahela Jayawardene and Tharanga to relieve the pressure.

Chief selector Faruque Ahmed also echoed the same sentiment but said that it could have been better if Bashar had attacked before the lunch break.

"He could have tried to attack four or five overs before lunch but I

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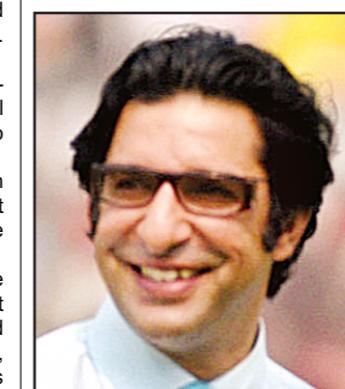
PHOTO: AFP

Sri Lankan opener Upul Tharanga raises bat to celebrate his century on the second day of the second Test against Bangladesh at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium on Thursday.

AKRAM INSWINGER



inside cricket with wasim



Sangakkara on the same score. The one that got the better of Sangakkara was a real beauty although I think the Sri Lankan was a bit unlucky, as the ball kept low. It was a good opportunity for Bangladesh to take lead in the first innings after grabbing four wickets for 43 runs but they simply failed to cash in on it.

After lunch, Mohammad Rafique did not turn the ball and bowled very flat. Actually, he never looked like getting a wicket. Here I feel that Bangladesh were lacking an all-rounder. You need a fifth bowler in the Test side who would bowl 15 overs and at the same time, would contain as well. Although Mohammad Ashraful took the wicket of captain Mahela Jayawardene who fell one run short of a deserved half-century, but he is good for hardly two to three overs at this level. You can't expect someone to bowl juicy full-tosses after sending back top four opposition batsmen.

The honours of the day goes to Upul Tharanga who began mod-

estly, took his time to settle before opening up with nice strokes. I think it is a very important century in his career because he had only one first-class hundred before this Test match. He is young and has the potential to play a long time for Sri Lanka if he can keep his head down. He virtually received no support from the teammates but for Jayawardene.

And Bangladesh should have attacked as soon as they saw the back of the rival captain. But the fast bowlers looked tired and the senior spinner of the side was not responding.

It is highly unlikely that from this stage, Bangladesh would go on to pull off a draw. With Tharanga still at the crease, the home side must get two wickets early in the morning but that would mean facing Mutiah Muralitharan who would be as hungry as ever on a turning track. Yes, Sri Lanka are clearly on the driving seat but Bangladesh also fought well to take six wickets on the day. They have more hard work to avoid a defeat.

Rajshahi keep one-day crown

ISPAHANI MIRZAPORE TEA 7th National Cricket League

SPORTS REPORTER

Rajshahi clinched their second consecutive National Cricket League one-day crown with two rounds remaining when they handed a five-wicket defeat on Sylhet in the eighth round yesterday.

With an all-win record, Rajshahi have taken an unassailable lead in the six-team table with 16 points. Chittagong caught up with Dhaka at second place after a 29-run victory against the hosts at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium. Bottom-table Barisal moved up the table with an impressive six-wicket home win over Khulna, who had national caps Manzurul Islam, Tushar Imran and Abdur Razzak back for the match.

RAJSHABI-SYLHET

After Shafiq Al Jaber and Moshfiq Rahaman's opening salvo reduced Sylhet to 42-5 by the tenth over, the visitors managed only 103 before being shot out at the Rajshahi

Divisional Stadium. Sohrawardi Shuvo mopped the tail taking three wickets for just nine runs.

Rajshahi also lost wickets at regular intervals but man-of-the-match Jahurul Islam carried on his bat in a responsible 58 of 98 balls to canter them to 106-5 inside 30 overs.

DHAKA-CHITTAGONG

Dhaka lost eight wickets for 77 runs after solid top-order batting to crash to their fourth successive defeat in the championship as they were all out for 216 in reply to Chittagong's 245. Skipper Al Shahriar (60 off 68 balls) and Mahmudullah Riyad (40 off 46 balls) added 88 runs for the third wicket to take the total to 139-2 but part-time left-arm spinner Faisal Hossain ripped through the middle order taking 4-25.

Earlier, Chittagong finished with a challenging total as Ilias Sunny (46 off 36 balls) and Gazi Alamgir (26 off 36 balls) put on invaluable 60 runs for the last wicket partnership after Nazimuddin's 37 and man-of-the-match Faisal's 32.

BARISAL-KHULNA

Four-half centuries spearheaded Barisal's six-wicket defeat of Khulna at the Barisal Stadium with Marshall Ayub providing the entertainment. Nasiruddin Faruque topscored 63 not out but young Marshall's explosive 37-ball 50 steered the home to the target while chasing Khulna's 246-6 built around in-form opener Nazmus Sadat's 98. Having hit ten boundaries in 118 balls, Sadat was run out in the 43rd over to miss a deserved century. Marshal, who hit five fours and one six, was adjudged man-of-the-match.

SCORES IN BRIEF

SYLHET: 103 all out in 36.4 overs (Imtiaz 28, Rezaul 27, Sadek 17, Shafiq 3-19, Moshfiq 2-25, Reza 1-16, Kamrul 1-30, Shuvo 3-9).
RAJSHABI: 106-5 in 29.4 overs (Jahurul 58 n.o., Farhad 13, Shuvo 10 n.o., Hasibul 1-35, Nazmul 1-22, SEE PAGE 17 COL 1

Pietersen salvages England

Cricket

AFP, Mohali

Ashes hero Kevin Pietersen cracked a robust 64 in murky conditions to help England survive early blows in the second Test against India here on Thursday.

The free-stroking batsman struck one six and 10 fours in his second successive half-century as England recovered from 36-2 to reach 163-4 at stumps on the opening day.

All-rounders Paul Collingwood (19) and Andrew Flintoff (four) were the not out batsmen when play was called off due to bad light.

Only 50.3 of the scheduled 90 overs were bowled after the match started 45 minutes late due to morning showers.

The match ended slightly in India's favour after debutant seamer Munaf Patel took his maiden Test wicket to dismiss Pietersen, who had threatened to put the attack to the sword before offering a return catch while driving uppishly.

Stand-in captain Flintoff, who

became a father for the second time on Wednesday, won a second successive toss on a good batting track but his openers failed to provide a solid start.

England lost left-handed openers Andrew Strauss (18) and Alastair Cook (17) in successive overs from left-arm seamer Irfan Pathan in bright morning sunshine before being stumped in overcast conditions by Pietersen and Ian Bell.

Strauss threw away his wicket after earlier batting sensibly, trying to cut a delivery outside the off-stump. He edged it to wicketkeeper Mahendra Dhoni who took a low diving catch to his left.

Pathan struck again when he trapped first Test hero Cook leg-before. The England opener had scored 60 and 104 not out on debut in the drawn Nagpur game.

Pietersen, who scored a brisk 87 in Nagpur, rallied his team with an 81-run stand for the third wicket with Bell (38).

Bell, who made nine and one at Nagpur, looked set to overcome his twin failures when he failed to read a googly from leg-spinner Anil Kumble SEE PAGE 17 COL 1

that hit the off-stump.

Kumble is now just three short of completing 500 Test wickets.

Australian leg-spinner Shane Warne, Sri Lankan off-spinner Muttiah Muralitharan, Australian paceman Glenn McGrath and retired West Indies fast bowler Courtney Walsh are the others to bag 500 or more Test wickets.

Pietersen played his natural ebullient game despite the loss of two early wickets, firmly driving the seamers and using his feet effectively against the spinners.

He was harsh on debutant leg-spinner Piyush Chawla, sweeping the bowler for a four and then swinging the next delivery for a six. He completed his half-century, the fifth of his Test career, by cutting Pathan for a four.

India made three changes from the team that drew the first Test, bringing in middle-order batsman Yuvraj Singh, Chawla and Patel.

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Holders eliminated

UEFA CHAMPS LEAGUE

REUTERS, Liverpool

Holders Liverpool paid heavily for missed chances as they were knocked out of the Champions League in a 2-0 defeat by Benfica on Wednesday.

Simao Sabrosa, who Liverpool tried to sign in the close season, played a key role for the Portuguese champions who now go into Friday's draw for the quarterfinals.

The tricky Benfica forward scored a stunning goal in the 36th minute before substitute Fabrizio Miccoli added a second in the dying minutes to secure a 3-0 aggregate victory.

"He's a good player and when you play deep with spaces and you have pace and ability it's normal that you can play well," said Benitez. "But for me the key was the first 20 minutes."

"I had confidence because we were creating chances but then we made a mistake and everything changed," he added. "We needed to score, we could not, we conceded a goal."

Benfica coach Ronald Koeman agreed with Benitez.

"In the first 30 minutes they played well and had great pressure on us," said the Dutchman. "We didn't play too well then and they had some big chances to score."

"We scored a fabulous goal from Simao and then we controlled it better. You need to be lucky, if not you can't beat teams like Liverpool... it's not just today that they've had problems to score, maybe now it's a mental problem for them."

Liverpool had not found the net in their last three Champions League matches but had to score to overcome a 1-0 deficit from the first leg at the Stadium of Light.

Their misfiring forwards hit the post twice in the first half and squandered numerous chances but just could not find a way past Moreto in the Benfica goal.

Peter Crouch was first to be denied by the woodwork when his shot deflected off Anderson past the keeper.

The England forward then conjured up an embarrassing miss in the 25th minute, following a typical surging run from midfield by Steven Gerrard, when he shot weakly past Moreto.

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