

AFC CHALLENGE CUP Hammam to witness final

SPORTS REPORTER

Asian Football Confederation (AFC) president Mohammad Bin Hammam will arrive in Dhaka tomorrow night to witness the final of the inaugural AFC Challenge Cup.

The AFC chief was also here when the tournament was inaugurated on April 1.

Tajikistan face Sri Lanka in the final at the Bangabandhu National Stadium on Sunday.

School cricket

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Kalindi High School, Badda ABN High School, Manarat International School and KL Jubilee School all won their respective matches in the Standard Chartered Young Tigers Cricket Competition at various venues in the city yesterday.

The highlight of the day was at the Uttara Friends Club ground where KL Jubilee gained a nail-biting one-wicket win over Bangladesh International School. A brilliant all-round show by Rana ensured the victory. He scored 36 and took 3 for 44. His teammate Soheli took 4 for 35.

In other matches, Taposh of Kalindi also had a good all-round performance while Soheli of Badda struck an unbeaten 96. Among the bowling performances, Arman of Manarat took 5 wickets in their victory over Happy Times School.

Zulhas no more

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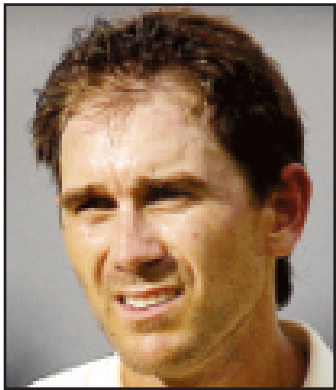
Zulhas Khan, veteran scorer and senior member of Bangladesh Cricket Board expressed deep shock at his death and conveyed their condolences to the bereaved family members.

Members of the Bangladesh Cricket Board expressed deep shock at his death and conveyed their condolences to the bereaved family members.



Did U Know?

'Pup' is the nickname of Australian middle-order batsman Michael Clarke.



Justin Langer
(Australia opener)
"It was like Lennox Lewis whacked me."
While recalling being hit by South Africa paceman Makhaya Ntini's bouncer in the head.

What to WATCH

DD National
India v England
Seventh and final ODI
Live at 9:30 am (Saturday)

ESPN
Manchester United v Sunderland
English Premiership
Live at 12:30 am (Saturday)

STAR Sports
Bolton Wanderers v Chelsea
English Premiership
Live at 5:40 pm (Saturday)

STAR Sports
Arsenal v West Bromwich
English Premiership
Live at 7:55 pm (Saturday)



PHOTO: STAR
Australian captain and match-winner Ricky Ponting acknowledges the crowd after Australia completed a victory over Bangladesh on the fifth day of the first Test at Fatullah on Thursday.

Tigers winners in defeat

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Bangladesh lost yet another Test in their 44th appearance when Australia snatched a three-wicket victory at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium on Thursday.

But it would be unfair to judge the Tigers on the mathematical equation, because the scoreboard did not show the real picture of how great a game it was. It would be loathe to compare it to the Tigers' previous 38 losses.

That was the reason Bangladesh team left the field holding their heads high despite the defeat on the thrilling fifth and final day against the mighty Australians.

Habibul Bashar's boys came tantalisingly close to pulling off Test cricket's biggest upset to date but Australia captain Ricky Ponting dashed their hopes with an unbeaten 118 runs which revived memories of Bangladesh's Multan

Test where Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq (138 not out) did almost a replica during the third Test in 2003 to manage a one-wicket victory.

"I think the situation was more difficult here than the Test match in Pakistan. Pakistan had a very vulnerable tail whereas it was not the case for the Australians and the condition was also altogether a different one. And mind it, the opponent's name is Australia," said Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar at a post-match briefing yesterday.

The 33-year old Tigers skipper said that there was every reason for them to be excited with their performance in the first Test match.

"I am sure that nobody expected before the start of the series that a Test match can finish in such a way. The way we started and then finished the match I must say it was a moral victory for us. I am very, very happy with my team's performance," he said.

"Although we didn't win, we pushed them to the last day and it

was a good Test match for us in all ways. We dominated two days of play and we took more out of it although in the end they won," said excited Bashar.

He heaped praise on his counterpart to take the game away from them.

"Credit goes to Australia for coming back so strongly. Maybe this is why they are the best team in the world. Even though we did badly in the second innings, I would say that they did equally good. Ricky's batting was the turning point. He took the game away from us," he explained.

Bashar pointed at the second innings failure as the reason to losing the way in the match but hoped it will be solved soon.

"Our habit of failing in the second innings after a good showing in the first innings is going to go away pretty soon. The more we create such situations, the better we will fare. We get situations like this after

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Hopes flies in for Watson

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James Hopes will fly to Bangladesh to replace the injured Shane Watson in Australia's one-day side. Watson is still recovering from a calf injury picked up when playing for Queensland in the recent Pura Cup final.

Hopes and Watson have been jostling for position, as Australia experiment with their squad ahead of next year's World Cup, with Watson preferred for the recent tour of South Africa and then getting the nod for Bangladesh.

But now Hopes will have the chance to stake his claims in the three-match ODI series, which starts in Chittagong on April 23. He has taken three wickets in the eight one-dayers he has played since making his debut against New Zealand in 2004. Seven of those were earlier this year in the triangular VB series at home.

Afridi announces brief retirement

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan all-rounder Shahid Afridi said Thursday he was retiring from Test cricket until after the 2007 World Cup to concentrate on the limited overs form of the game.

"I will not play Test cricket and will reconsider my future as a Test cricketer after next year's World Cup," Afridi told AFP.

The surprise decision means that the 26-year-old Afridi will be unavailable for a Test series in England in July and August and also for Pakistan's home series against the West Indies in November and their tour of South Africa early next year.

There was immediate speculation that Afridi's temporary retirement from the Test arena maybe a knee-jerk reaction to being dropped from the last Test against Sri Lanka in Kandy, a Test Pakistan ultimately won.

But Afridi said the strains of an excessive cricketing schedule were

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RICKY Ponting played a captain's knock to steer his team to a three-wicket win on the last day of the most memorable Test match played between the two sides. Obviously Bangladesh played very well but in my opinion they should have won this game. If the

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What could have happened if Australia lost the first Test against Bangladesh is now just a matter of guesswork.

But when many thought that a defeat could be more painful than their Ashes surrender in July last year, Australian skipper Ricky Ponting found no reason to take the issue into his account.

"It is hypothetical to think about what could have happened because we didn't lose the game," said Ponting, who led from the front with an unbeaten 118 to rescue his side from final embarrassment against the Tigers, with an ambiguous smile at a post-match briefing.

The 31-year-old Aussie skipper

AKRAM INSWINGER

batsmen would have played with more responsibility in the second innings the result would have been different.

The Australians showed their true character of fighting back and coming back from behind to win the match. This goes to show why Australia are the world champion, they are mentally very strong, physically very fit and they believe in themselves you can not write them off at any stage of the game. This morning Bangladeshi bowlers did well by taking two quick wickets to get right back into the game. But it was the sheer fighting spirit of Australia which sealed the victory in the end in a match which Bangladesh.

Brett Lee played a gem of an innings and played some confident shots, which took the pressure off the skipper. Ponting gave a difficult catch to Mashrafe but he was a bit slow to start and eventually dropped it. Catches like these that win matches and the players should expect to catch every ball and convert half chances to a catch. Ponting showed he is a great leader

by winning this match for his team. This is probably his most difficult innings in his career.

For Bangladesh, Enamul Haque bowled below par and gave away too many runs but the most senior player, Mohammed Rafique, bowled very well and kept Bangladesh's hopes alive and the two opening bowlers also bowled well with the new ball.

Bangladesh should learn from the mistakes made in this game, in particular the batsmen should take a lesson not to throw their wickets unnecessarily by playing slog sweep shots. Had they batted sensibly in the second innings it would have been a different story.

I thought Bangladeshi bowlers did a good job and showed in both the innings that they can bowl against any team and perform well.

Overall it was a great Test match and Bangladesh team should be proud of the fact that the world number one team were really tested. This should give them a lot of confidence in the second Test and the rest of the series.

Ricky a relieved man

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however admitted that the hard-fought victory against the home side brought more relief than joy.

"Yes, probably right (more relief than joy after you have avoided an embarrassing defeat). It was a very good Test match win," said Ponting, who smashed his 31st hundred in 104 Tests.

Ponting agreed that Bangladesh's performance was beyond their expectation but he issued a warning that they will come hard on the home team in the second Test match at Chittagong that starts from April 16.

"Bangladesh played better than what I expected from them, they should be pretty happy. If we are well-prepared for the next Test, they won't be able to make this sort of a total against us anymore. We want to be physically and mentally right to face it in Chittagong," warned

Ponting.

"We were really surprised by their first day performance because 355 runs in a day was simply outstanding. Actually Bangladesh had the better of play in the first two days. (Shahriar) Nafees played a sensational knock and it was a very good Test match hundred (138)," he said.

He also said Bangladesh has the ability to give any team in the world a tough time.

"They played excellent cricket in the match and they proved that they are an improving side and they can trouble any team in the world. I think Bangladesh can take inspiration from the performance of this Test," he opined.

He also explained the reasons for his side's bad performance in the first two days.

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Rabiev sinks Kyrgyzstan

Tajikistan play final against Sri Lanka



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Two-goal Yusuf Rabiev inspired Tajikistan to reach the final of the inaugural AFC Challenge Cup when they blanked their central Asian neighbours Kyrgyzstan 2-0 in yesterday's second semifinal at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

The midfielder struck both the goals after a barren first-half as Tajikistan took revenge of their 1-0 group-stage loss to Kyrgyzstan. They now take on Sri Lanka in the April 16 finale.

Khurshed Makhmudov almost drew first blood when the Tajikistan media collected a third-minute corner by Odil Irgashev outside the area and weaved past two defenders into the box. His powerful left-footer gave rival goalkeeper Vladislav Volkov no chance to react but Sergey Kniazev cleared it from the goalline.

Tajikistan totally outclassed their opposition in the midfield and enjoyed superior ball possession but Kyrgyzstan kept things tight with a six-pack defence, allowing the opposition no space in the danger zone.

The pressure told six minutes after the break when Rabiev stabbed in from close after Dzhomikhon Muhidinov's first-time effort on a right-flank cross by fullback Oev Dzhomodin rebounded off the defence wall.

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PHOTO: STAR
Tajikistan's two-goal hero Yusuf Rabiev celebrates his first strike during their AFC Challenge Cup semifinal against Kyrgyzstan at the Bangabandhu National Stadium in Dhaka on Thursday.