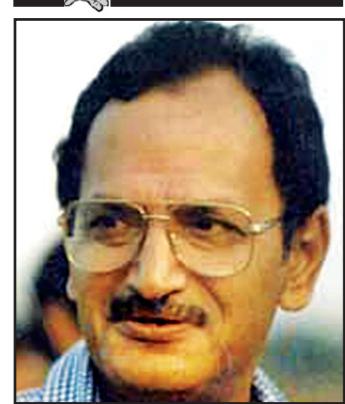




Did U Know?

Trinidad and Tobago were the only team not to register a single goal in the FIFA 2006 World Cup.



Ajit Wadekar

(Former India cricket captain)
"An experienced player like Sourav Ganguly knows how to pace his innings, which can be invaluable for a big tournament like the World Cup."

What to WATCH

ESPN
South Africa v Pakistan
First Test, Day 1
Live at 2:30 pm
Sportscenter India
Live at 9:30 pm

Akhtar, Asif in WC squad

AFP, Lahore

Pakistan on Wednesday included the fast bowlers Shoaib Akhtar and Mohammad Asif in their 30-man World Cup initial squad, an official said, despite uncertainty over their doping cases.

Akhtar and Asif launched successful appeals last month after a tribunal banned them for two years and one year respectively for testing positive for the banned steroid nandrolone.

A Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) appellate committee absolved them of the charges on the grounds they did not take the banned substances knowingly, but the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) has challenged the lifting of the ban.

Nonetheless, the PCB said the players were free to play. Asif is with the Pakistan team in South Africa, while Akhtar is expected to fly out on Thursday after he was named as a replacement.

"As far as we are concerned both Asif and Akhtar are free to play. We will cross the bridge when it comes," chief selector Wasim Barot told AFP.

Another paceman, Shabir Ahmed, who was last month cleared after serving a one year ban over illegal bowling action, is also among the probables.

Pakistan face the West Indies in the opening match of the World Cup on March 13 at Jamaica. Inzamam-ul-Haq was already named to lead the side while a final 15-man squad will be announced next month.

Pakistan won the World Cup in Australia in 1992.

Probables: Inzamamul Haq, Younis Khan, Imran Farhat, Mohammad Hafeez, Mohammad Yousuf, Shoaib Malik, Kamran Akmal, Abdul Razzaq, Umar Gul, Shahid Nazir, Danish Kaneria, Yasir Hameed, Shabbir Ahmed, Mohammad Sami, Abdul Rehman, Salman Butt, Faisal Iqbal, Rana Navedul Hasan, Rao Iftikhar, Imran Nazir, Shahid Afridi, Mohammad Khalil, Bazid Khan, Mansoor Anjum, Zulqarnain Haider, Yasir Arafat, Mohammad Asif, Shoaib Akhtar, Misbah-ul-Haq, Hasan Raza.

HASANUZZAMAN HITS FIRST CENTURY

Big guns cruise

SPORTS REPORTER



The Kai-Altech Premier Cricket League began under brilliant sunshine with Hasanuzzaman glittering most in a blazing hundred but all three opening day's matches proved to be mismatches at different venues yesterday.

Despite the threat of bad weather, only one match was curtailed due to dense fog where last year runners-up Sonargaon Cricketers shot out newcomers Partex Sporting Club for a paltry 44 to secure an eight wicket-victory at the Fatullah Cricket Stadium.

Chasing their hattrick title, Old DOHS made a flying start with a comfortable seven-wicket victory over other newcomers Young Pegasus at the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium.

Victoria Sporting Club rode on Hasanuzzaman's unbeaten 129 to register an emphatic nine-wicket win against Indira Road Krira Chakra at BKSP.

DOHS-PEGASUS

New ball bowlers Shahadat Hossain and Dollar Mahmud capitalised on the conditions to wrap up the Pegasus innings for 126 after

DOHS skipper Akram Khan made no mistake to send his opponents to bat first.

National paceman Shahadat claimed three wickets for 36 while man-of-the-match Dollar, called for Bangladesh's World Cup initial squad, initiated an early collapse with 3-13 to rattle the Pegasus players, most of whom only came in the morning from Rajshahi to play the match.

Tigers opener Mehrab Hossain returned early on four but Tamim Iqbal (54) and Ehsanul Haque (44 not out) associated in a 74-run stand for the second wicket as DOHS posted 128 for three in 36.3 overs.

Like the Twenty20 League there was also a delayed start due to the formal opening ceremony.

SONARGAON-PARTEX

It was a disastrous Premiershipt debut for Partex when Sonargaon's young paceman Mahbubul Alam returned with figures of five for 24 after Mohammad Ashraful invited the promotees to bat.

TODAY'S MATCHES

Mohammedan v Kalabagan (FCS)
Biman v Abahani (BKSP)
Brothers v City Club (DCS).

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PHOTO: STAR

Old DOHS opener Tamim Iqbal flicks the ball towards mid-wicket during his sparkling 54 against Young Pegasus in the Kai-Altech Premier Cricket League at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Hunt for pacers again

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

It has been told that lanky Shahadat Hossain is the paceman groomed faster than any of his colleagues but still there is discontent that Bangladesh have yet to produce a new ball bowler like Mashrafee-bin-Mortuza.

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), however, believes that developing genuine pace bowlers is the area they should give priority for a better future as many think there are some good medium pacers in the pipeline but there is lack of a true quick bowler who can bowl at 140kmpm or above.

With a view to find real quickies, the board in collaboration with

country's leading cellular phone company is going to launch the "GrameenPhone Pacer Hunt" programme for the second time after a gap of two years.

The programme will start on February 7 across the country.

The first attempt in 2004 saw enormous enthusiasm countrywide where over eight thousand aspirants came to flex their muscles but unfortunately two top prospects - Wasqurani Palash and Zahid Hossain -- faded away from spotlight due to suspect actions in spite of being sent to the Indian Academy (MRF).

Sarwar Imran, head coach of National Pace Academy, who is also running the Pacer Hunt show, is not frustrated at all with the outcome of the previous event and hoped that the initiative will make

"It was not frustrating in the last time although the two fastest bowlers disappointed us. But we have found a quick bowler like Shubashish Roy who is now at the academy along with two other promising players, Kamrul Islam and Mohammad Azim," he added.

BCB general secretary Mahbubul Anam said that the board has chalked out an elaborate programme to make it a real success.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

immense contribution in future. "No doubt our ultimate target is to find out a bowler like Mashrafee but you should realise that he is a rare breed of talent. I think it's a long process to find some raw quick bowlers and then prepare them for future," said the former Bangladesh coach in a press conference at a local hotel yesterday.

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Four new faces in WC probables

SPORTS REPORTER

As expected, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) yesterday named its 30-member probables for the World Cup in the West Indies.

There are a few fresh calls and the only big name missing is Nafis Iqbal, the opening batsman under contract with the board who has no chance of recovery from injury.

The new faces, although they hardly look to contest for the final 15-member squad that will make the Caribbean trip, are hard-hitting opener Junaed Siddique who sparked in the recently concluded Twenty20 League, Nafis' younger brother Tamim Iqbal who is also a big-hitter, seamer Mohammad Mahmud and all-rounder Marshall Ayub.

Significantly, Mohammad Sharif has returned to the national fold after over three years, showing improved performance with both bat and ball following recovery from injury.

Among the 30, wicketkeeper Shahidul Hossain Pavel and top-order batsman Nazmus Sadat were in the probables list for the ICC Champions Trophy but never managed to make it to a national camp.

The squad will be halved in mid-February.

SQUAD

Habibur Bashar, Shahidul Nafees, Khaled Mashud, Mohammad Rafique, Mashrafee-bin-Mortuza, Javed Omar, Mohammad Ashraful, Aftab Ahmed, Raji Saleh, Shahidul Hossain, Tushar Imran, Alok Kapali, Tapash Baishya, Abdur Razzak, Manzurul Islam Rana, Syed Rasel, Moshique Rahim, Enamul Haque Jr, Nazmul Hossain, Farhad Reza, Sakib Al Hasan, Mehrab Hossain Jr, Nadir Chowdhury, Nazmus Sadat, Shahidul Hossain Pavel, Junaed Siddique, Mohammad Sharif, Dollar Mahmud, Marshal Ayub, Tamim Iqbal.

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Pace worry for teams

PAK-SA 1st Test today

Cricket

AFP, Centurion

his arrival. Gul, meanwhile, may still be considered.

While Pakistan contemplate their options, Shahidul Nazir advanced a strong claim for inclusion by taking five wickets against the Rest of South Africa on a batsman-friendly pitch in Kimberley.

South Africa are expected to be without Dale Steyn, their fastest bowler, who is likely to be rested after playing a significant role in the host nation's come-from-behind win over India in Cape Town last Saturday.

Steyn missed the second Test against India because of a thigh strain and coach Mickey Arthur said he would probably sit out the Centurion match to give him time to make a full recovery.

Andre Nel is likely to be back in action after recovering from a heel injury.

Former South African fast bowler

ing great Allan Donald said he was concerned that South Africa's fast bowlers were suffering from a work overload in the run-up to the World Cup.

After three back-to-back Tests against India, South Africa play another three in as many weeks against Pakistan.

"The World Cup should have been our focus," Donald told The Star newspaper. "Ideally a month of preparation should have started now. Instead we are going to put in a lot of miles in the next three Tests and unless we give guys some rest we could be in trouble."

Donald complained that South Africa and Pakistan were the only teams playing Test cricket so close to the World Cup in March and

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Onus on racial quotas

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

South Africa have announced their provisional 30-man squad for the World Cup in the West Indies in March. Their convenor of selectors, Haroon Lorgat, has said that the selectors are very close to finalising the 15 names who will travel to the Caribbean, but denied that colour would be an influence on selection.

Lorgat said that although CSA had set the selectors a target of at least seven players of colour, the team would be selected on merit. "There are just a few nuts and bolts that we have to sort out," he said. "I

"I would be over the moon if we could pick seven or more (players of colour), but we're not picking on colour, we're picking the best team."

There were no surprises in the provisional squad, which contains all but three of the current South African Test team -- Paul Adams, Hashim Amla and Morne Morkel.

The squad must be cut to 15 by February 13, and Gerald Majola, CEO of Cricket South Africa, said: "All these players have been involved in high level domestic or international competition, and have also been part of the high performance programme since last season."

"The fruits of the franchise

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PHOTO: INTERNET
THE WALL RESTS: Under fire Indian captain Rahul Dravid dozes off while waiting for his turn to bat during Karnataka's innings against Saurashtra in the Ranji Trophy at Rajkot on Wednesday.

Cricket

AFP, Melbourne

Despite a world record performance against England, Australia's senior cricketers are divided on the merits of international Twenty20 cricket.

The International Cricket Council (ICC) is considering holding an inaugural Twenty20 World

Cup in South Africa later this year, but even a record total at the Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG) did not fully convince Australian wicket-keeper-batsman Adam Gilchrist about the newest form of the game, which was born in English county cricket in 2003.

Australia's total of 221 against England was the highest in the brief 13-game history of international Twenty20 cricket and was watched by a full house at the SCG.

However, Gilchrist, who hit five sixes in a dashing 48 at the top of the Australian innings, warned against cricket administrators getting carried away with the initial success of the format.

The Australian keeper said there was a novelty factor that could easily be lost through more regular Twenty20 fixtures and said he had "question marks" over the World Cup suggestion when the format was so new.

"Last night was the first time I have been bitten by it, if you like," Gilchrist said on Wednesday.

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Ad