

Minhaz pips Shamima to claim title

SPORTS REPORTER

Minhazuddin Ahmed clinched the Basic Bank 28th National Junior Chess Championship at the Federation hallroom yesterday.

He defeated Abdullah Al Saif to finish at the top with nine points after the leader for seven rounds Shamima Akhtar slipped further after the ninth round. She finished as the runner-up after drawing her tie with Nurul Islam.

He joins the esteemed company of GM Ziaur Rahman, GM Reefat Bin Sattar and IM Abdullah Al Rakib who all won the competition previously.

LOCAL SNIPPETS

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Maulana Bhasani National Hockey Stadium.

National forward Russel Mahmud Jimmy and Shuvo scored two goals while Prince and Asif struck one each as SBSL crushed Crystal Cooperative Alliance 6-0.

Army rode on Mustafa who scored both goals in their win over Bangladesh Air Force in the other match of the day.

Batting holds

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Ganguly's triumphant return to India's colours augurs well because the stylish left-hander has given his team an option to try out a different opener in recent matches.

Ganguly, only the second Indian after Tendulkar with more than 10,000 runs in one-dayers, hammered an impressive 96 against the West Indies in January 2007 in his first match in 16 months to remind the selectors his sun had not yet set.

The stylish southpaw had fallen out of selectors' favour after a public spat with the coach and was forced to play domestic cricket before returning to the Indian squad.

"It was never Chappell v Ganguly, never between two personalities. I only look at cricketing issues. Ganguly has come back extremely well and all credit to him. Right now, I have nothing but praise for him," said the Indian coach.

Things started looking up when Tendulkar hammered a 76-ball hundred in the fourth and final one-day against the West Indies at Vadodara in January this year after months of silence.

India's bowling was inconsistent last year, with left-arm seamer Irfan Pathan's form being a major worry. He kept losing confidence with each mediocre performance before being dropped for a couple of matches.

India have yet to decide whether to include both spinners Anil Kumble and Harbhajan Singh in the playing eleven or go with an extra batsman. But there is no denying the fact the batting holds the key to their fortunes.

India were the champions in 1983, runners-up in 2003 and semi-finalists in 1987 and 1996.



PHOTO: COURTESY

Minhazuddin Ahmed, who clinched the Basic Bank 28th National Junior Chess Championship, ponders his next move against Abdullah Al Saif (not in picture) at the federation hallroom yesterday.

Not Holding minnows

AFP, Hamilton



Former West Indies Test star Michael Holding believes the World Cup will be devalued by the number of non-Test playing nations taking

part.

The fast bowling legend insists that only the top-ranked Associate country in the world should be allowed to take part.

When the 2007 World Cup gets underway in the Caribbean on March 11, there will be six non-Test teams involved, seven if Zimbabwe, who have temporarily lost their Test status, are included.

"I do not believe the World Cup should go on for as long as it does (almost two months) and that is partly because there are far too many teams in the competition who are not good enough to be there," the 53-year-old told the Royal Gazette.

"I've argued about this with the ICC

for some time. I simply do not believe that if you come fourth in the ICC Trophy that you should be entitled to play in the World Cup.

"It does not make sense to me. What is gained by a team playing in the World Cup and getting absolutely hammered? In my opinion it is counter-productive.

"What I believe should happen is that all the non-Test playing nations should continue to play amongst themselves, to have their own competition where only the top-ranked country goes through to the World Cup.

"I see nothing wrong with giving the smaller teams the odd tour and a few games against the bigger teams from time to time. And I think the ICC should continue to invest in non-Test playing nations to improve their cricket and their infrastructure and things like that.

"But it's a big jump from that to having six non-Test nations all playing against the cream of the crop. It's not good for cricket."

The 16-nation tournament will include Scotland, Netherlands, Bermuda, Canada, Kenya and

Ireland, all of whom have yet to play Test matches.

Meanwhile, Holding insists that the marathon tournament will be a success despite ongoing problems with stadium construction, soaring hotel prices, visa problems and reports of sluggish ticket sales.

"There have been some problems in some aspects of the preparation, but the logistics of organising a World Cup which is spread out over a region made up of many sovereign nations, with different laws, governments and currencies, was always going to be hard," he said.

"We tend to do things at the last minute in the Caribbean – it's part of our culture.

"Even on the morning of a Test match there's always people hammering in nails somewhere or somebody painting something. It's the same with tickets as well.

"People in the Caribbean don't buy tickets months in advance, they tend to do it on the day of the game or a couple of days before."

'Test and then go'

CRICINFO, undated



No player in the Pakistan squad will go to the World Cup without having undergone a dope test, the Pakistan

Cricket Board (PCB) reaffirmed Tuesday.

"Unless a player has had a dope test conducted he is not going to the World Cup. It is as simple as that," Saleem Altaf, director cricket operations, told Cricinfo.

Altaf was responding to grow-

ing concern over the fact that three players from the squad of 15 (and five reserves) were yet to be tested. In particular, the absence of Mohammad Asif and Shoaib Akhtar from the testing, held over the weekend in Karachi and Lahore by the PCB, had led to raised eyebrows.

Both players tested positive for an anabolic steroid last year and were handed bans, only for the verdict to be controversially overturned a month later. After a doping expert Danish Zaheer warned that they still might be carrying traces of Nandrolone in their bloodstream, enough perhaps for another positive test, speculation had grown not only over what might happen were Asif and Shoaib to be tested again, but whether they would be tested at all.

Past no

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Siro. It was there they lost the 2001 Champions League final to Bayern Munich on penalties, a year after their defeat to Spanish rivals Real Madrid in the 2000 final.

Inter have lost just once at home to Spanish clubs in 15 matches in European competitions, their only defeat coming against Alaves in the fourth round of the UEFA Cup in the 2000-01 season. Valencia, meanwhile, have struggled on their visits to Italy in the past with just one victory in nine matches.

Sri Lanka: A tight unit

AFP, New Delhi



Sri Lanka will be keen to maintain their recently acquired reputation of doing consistently well away from home when they begin

their World Cup campaign in the Caribbean.

None of the three other sub-continent sides can match an impressive record of Mahela Jayawardene's Sri Lankans, who won more than 50 per cent of their one-day internationals in 2006.

That included a rare 5-0 white-wash in England and a shared series in New Zealand.

Those results underline the fact that Sri Lanka will not be a soft side in the one-day extravaganza although they would have received a wake-up call by their 2-1 defeat in India earlier this month.

It is a nice blend of experience and youth that has made Sri Lanka a team to watch out for in the tournament, especially under Australian coach Tom Moody who

knows a thing or two about World Cup having figured in three editions.

Sri Lanka's strength still is batting but their bowling has improved considerably recently, with Lasith Malinga capable of doing unpredictable things with the new ball.

They were always considered a two-bowler team of left-arm pace-man Chaminda Vaas and ace off-spinner Muttiah Muralidaran who have a total of 802 wickets between them in one-dayers.

Things have changed now as Malinga, a bowler with a deceptive round-arm action, has given his team more options with his consistency, a fact admitted by his captain.

"Malinga has given a different dimension to our overall bowling attack. The attacking options have become more," said Jayawardene.

"We have 'Vassy' (Vaas) who takes early wickets. Murali is in the middle and Malinga becomes another attacking option upfront as well as in the middle overs. He is pretty good in the last few overs as well.

Yardy puts

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with some of the guys on show out there. There were quite a few who played a number of exemplary shots and are worth watching for, if we are going to get anything from this tour."

As regards to interesting selection, Yardy declared himself satisfied with the team and mentioned that he was glad to have such big name prospects like Nick Compton, grandson of the legendary Denis and up and coming leggie Adil Rashid in the team.

"It is great to have such talented players in the team. Nick (Compton) has played some wonderful cricket and he even scored a century against us (Sussex). A lot has also been made of Adil and he has turned in some superlative bowling performances. I am very excited to have them in the team and they are excited to be here."

There was still time for Loudon to come up with a few party tricks of his own and he epitomised the building bridges theme of the event by sprouting a few phrases in Bangla.

Larsson going

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"This is a great adventure for me. I arrived in January and I'm going home in March to play in Sweden. It suits me perfectly."

Jose's home

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part of the job. I know the job I did there, I know the history I did in that club and not even whistles or boos can delete the history."

Chelsea will be encouraged by the return of Michael Ballack from injury following the Germany captain's recovery from a thigh injury he suffered on international duty earlier in the month.

Mourinho will have to reshuffle his defence once more having lost Khalid Boulahrouz for several weeks with a dislocated shoulder, but he insists that his injury-blighted squad will fly south in confident mood.

"The message I want to give to my players is that they have to be more worried about us than we are about them," he said. "This week we have two finals: Porto is like a final and Arsenal is really a final."

Benitez fines 15?

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Telegraph, his latest brush with controversy has convinced Benitez to offload the Welsh striker at the end of the season.

Having inspired the best season of his troubled career, Blackburn manager Mark Hughes is expected to offer Bellamy a Premiership lifeline.

However, The Sun says that Aston Villa manager Martin O'Neill, who signed Bellamy on loan two years ago for Celtic, will also make a move.

Macs seal whitewash

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between New Zealand and Australia in Hamilton on Tuesday:

AUSTRALIA
Hayden not out 181
Watson lbw b Patel 68
Haddin c Vincent b Tuffey 38
Hodge b Patel 12
Hussey c McCullum b Gillespie 13
White c Styris b Gillespie 13
Voges not out 16
Extras: (b-1, lb-1, w-1, nb-2) 5
Total: (For 5 wks in 50 overs) 346
Did not bat: Hogg, Bracken, Tait, Johnson.
Fall of wickets: 1-122, 2-210, 3-251, 4-279, 5-302.

| Bowler | O | M | R | W |
|-----------|----|---|----|---|
| Tuffey | 10 | 0 | 68 | 1 |
| Franklin | 10 | 0 | 43 | 0 |
| Gillespie | 10 | 0 | 83 | 2 |
| Patel | 10 | 0 | 70 | 2 |
| Styris | 8 | 0 | 52 | 0 |
| McMillan | 2 | 0 | 28 | 0 |

NEW ZEALAND
Vincent c Hogg b Tait 11
Fleming c Hodge b Tait 9
Taylor c and b Bracken 11
Styris c Haddin b Johnson 0
Fulton c Hussey b Watson 51

| | |
|---|-----|
| McMillan b Watson | 117 |
| McCullum not out | 86 |
| Franklin c Voges b Johnson | 2 |
| Tuffey c Haddin b Johnson | 8 |
| Gillespie run out (Voges) | 28 |
| Patel not out | 0 |
| Extras: (lb-4, w-22, nb-1) | 27 |
| Total: (For 9 wks in 49.3 overs) | 350 |
| Fall of wickets: 1-23, 2-34, 3-38, 4-41, 5-116, 6-281, 7-285, 8-303, 9-339. | |

| Bowler | O | M | R | W |
|---------|-----|---|----|---|
| Bracken | 9.3 | 0 | 44 | 1 |
| Tait | 10 | 0 | 60 | 2 |
| Johnson | 10 | 0 | 81 | 3 |
| Watson | 10 | 0 | 88 | 2 |
| Hogg | 7 | 0 | 40 | 0 |
| Voges | 3 | 0 | 33 | 0 |

Result: New Zealand won by one wicket and clinched the three-match series 3-0.

Man-of-the-match: Matthew Hayden.

Toss: Australia

Umpires: Aleem Dar (PAK) and Gary Baxter (NZL)

Match referee: Mike Procter (RSA)

"We are stronger in bowling than when I first came into the team. Now we have a bowling attack that would suit any wicket anywhere in the world. We are in better situation because our pace bowling has improved."

Sri Lanka's batting remains as versatile as ever.

They have explosive left-handed openers in veteran Sanath Jayasuriya and Upul Tharanga who can demolish any attack.

Jayasuriya, 37, is no stranger to the big event as he will be playing in his fifth, and probably the last, World Cup. He is the only Sri Lankan to have completed 10,000 runs in one-dayers.

Tharanga's emergence as an exciting stroke-maker means that there will be fireworks from both the ends. He made a strong statement in the last Champions Trophy in India with back-to-back centuries.

There will be no respite for the opposition as wicketkeeper-batsman Kumar Sangakkara, Jayawardene and Tillakaratne Dilshan are capable of stepping up the run-rate in the middle order.

Sri Lanka should not face any difficulty in advancing to the next round from Group B, which comprises India, an inconsistent Bangladesh and first-timers Bermuda. The top two teams will make it to the next stage.

"What we've got to recognise is that a number of teams are going into this World Cup with very high expectations," said Moody.

"You look at South Africa, Pakistan, New Zealand, Sri Lanka and India. All these sides are pretty evenly-matched, particularly on neutral territory.

"We as a group feel very confident going into this World Cup. My focus and the team's must not be the World Cup, but the first game we play in the Caribbean. The most important game we play is our first which is in Trinidad."

His team open their campaign against Bermuda on March 15.

Sri Lanka, who played the first two World Cups as a non-Test-playing nation, were the champions in 1996 and semifinalists in 2003.

Anwar steadies

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BARISAL-KHULNA

Hannan Sarker and Rokibul Hasan associated 114 runs for the second wicket stand as Barisal scored 272-9 after opted to bat first.

Former national opener Hannan scored 74 off 132 balls with the help of eight fours and a six while his partner contributed 73 off 205 deliveries that featured five boundaries.

Left-arm spinner Humayun Kabir not only dismissed both the batsmen but also finished as the most successful Khulna bowler picking up four wickets for 92 runs.

SCORES IN BRIEF

DHAKA: First innings- 300-3 in 90 overs (Uttam 62, Anwar 108, Al Shahriar 71, Shamsur 39 not out, Riyad o not out, extras 20; Sunny 1-64, Sabbir 2-84).

SYLHET: First Innings- 200 all out in 66.5 overs (Golam Rahman 0, Imtiaz 88, Saif 14, Rezaul 4, Kapali 4, Golam Mowla 48 not out, Golam Mabud 1, Ejaz 8, Khadem 11, Hasibul 0, Samad 8, extras 14; Shafaq 2-43, Mushfiqur 2-24, Forhad 6-54).

RAJSHAHI: First innings- 56-1 in 18 overs (Rabul 2, Rafiqul 35 not out, Forhad 12 not out, extras 7; Hasibul 1-14).

BARISAL: First innings- 272-9 in 94.5 overs (Imran 8, Hannan 74, Rokibul 73, Nayeem 36, Raisul 16, Shaheen 1, Salahuddin 14, Ariful 14, Rajon 23 not out, Tariqul 1, extras 11; Mahmood 2-27, Manjarul 2-42, Kabir 4-92).

8x3

8x3