



8 DAYS TO GO

Sobers to open the World Cup

AFP, Kingston

West Indies legendary all-rounder Sir Garfield Sobers will officially open the 2007 World Cup, organisers said on Friday.

The 70-year-old Sobers will open the 16-team event in Jamaica on March 11.

"It's a great honour to declare the Cricket World Cup open. I'm taking it in my stride and I'm looking forward to the occasion," said Sobers from his home in Barbados.

The former West Indies skipper said he was excited that cricket's showpiece event was coming to the region for the first time.

"It will be phenomenal for the Caribbean, especially for those people who haven't had the opportunity to see a Cricket World Cup. It will be a fantastic experience."



Did U Know?

Alec Bedser, the former England fast bowler, is the only bowler to dismiss Australian legend Don Bradman for a duck on more than one occasion.



Sachin Tendulkar

(India's star batsman)
"To be honest, to play well and win the World Cup is our long cherished dream. Not only mine, but it's the team's dream."



ESPN
English Premier Football League
Liverpool v Man United
Live at 6:40 pm
Arsenal v Reading
Live at 8:55 pm

STAR Sports
English Premier Football League
Newcastle v Middlesbrough
Live at 8:55 pm
Portsmouth v Chelsea
Live at 11:10 pm
Primera Liga
Valencia v Celta Vigo
Live at 1:30 am (Sunday)
Sevilla v Barcelona
Live at 3:00 am (Sunday)



B League
Brothers Union v Ctg Abahani (5:00 pm)
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium
Khulna Abahani v Rahmatganj (3:45 pm)
Venue: Khulna Stadium
Bangladesh A v England A
Third Day, Second Four-Dayer
Venue: Shaheed Chandu Stadium, Bogra



A combo picture shows (L) Sports Adviser to the caretaker government Tapan Chowdhury (3rd from R) releasing balloons to inaugurate the first-ever professional football league, B.League, in the country while (R) Muktiyodha midfielder Saiful Islam (R) tries in vain to fell Abahani attacker Abul with a tackle from behind during the opening match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.



PHOTO: STAR

Goalless draw in eventful opener



SPORTS REPORTER

The B.League got off to a moderate start as Abahani and Muktiyodha showed the signs of early season fragility to share points in a goalless draw yesterday.

The opening match of the inaugural professional football league at the Bangabandhu National Stadium, however, was no less eventful with both sides reduced to ten men after 49 minutes.

Abahani midfielder Abul Hossain pushed rival defensive medio Arman Aziz in retaliation after the latter punched him in a mid pitch scuffle and referee Tayeb Hassan did not hesitate at all to give both the players marching order.

Both the sides began cautiously

and Muktiyodha rushed early blood when Arman's curling freekick from the left was spectacularly kept out by the experienced sky-blues keeper Biplab in the sixth minute.

Abahani, who had to field an all local side as the International Transfer Certificates of three Argentine booters were not available, hit back three minutes later. Muktiyodha goalie Titumeer lost a cross on the edge of the area, giving rival fullback Siraji a shot at the open goal the 25-yard volley was headed out from the goal line by Rajani for a corner.

The Reds, playing their home match, only threatened from setpieces and skipper Moni forced another fine save by Biplab from a 35-yard freekick in the 15th minute. Their domination soon fizzled out as their overweight strikers Alfaz and Moni were successfully handcuffed by a very tight Abahani backline.

The sky-blues came alive with strings of crisp passes and began to slice the rival defence often, but lack of pace and poor finishing denied

them from taking a deserved lead in the first half.

Their Argentine coach Diego Cruciani had said before the match that the players' fitness was 50 percent and it was proved when Ujjal committed an unpardonable mistake in the 43rd minute.

Playing behind the lone striker, Ujjal perhaps had one eye on the assistant referee's flag when Pranotosh set him up inside the box. And the puzzled Abahani attacker, who just needed to lob the advancing keeper after being played inside, took a feeble volley straight into Titumeer's gloves much to the frustration of a 12,000-strong crowd.

Nazrul then headed an Ujjal freekick just wide of the post on the brink of the breather.

Although Abahani enjoyed superior ball possession and won

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Brittle BD A batting

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh A stumbled in their first innings again against visiting England A with the ball being rolled for only one session on the second day of the four-day match at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogra yesterday.

The home team were reduced to 121-8 in 45 overs at stumps as the tourists pacemen exploited the condition after visiting skipper Michael Yardy decided to put their opponents into bat on the covered pitch after the first day's play was completely washed out due to rain.

Like the first game at Mirpur where Tushar Imran's side had a disastrous start ultimately to lose the game by five wickets, the local batsmen went after the ball as it was pitched outside the off-stump on most occasions.

Wicketkeeper Sahagir Hossain kept his nerve like in the previous game to remain unbeaten on 30 while tail-ender Enamul Haque accompanied him with 12 before stumps were drawn for the day.

Paceman Stuart Broad started the carnage by an in-swinging to rattle the stumps of Jahurul Islam in the very third ball of the innings, had left-hander Nasiruddin

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LOCAL SNIPPETS

SPORTS REPORTER

Sohel bowled Rayer Bazar School to a four-wicket victory over Rashid Adarsha High School in the Standard Chartered Young Tigers National School Cricket Tournament at the Kalindi cricket ground.

Sohel bagged six wickets for 21 runs to wrap up Rashid Adarsha innings for 152 in 29.2 overs. Rayer Bazar posted 153-6 in 26.5 overs.

In the day's other matches, Kurmitola High School (127-4) defeated Shaheed Ramizuddin High School (126-7) by six wickets at the Dhanmondi Club ground, Sena Palli (134-7) beat Banani Biddyaniketon (130-10) by three wickets at the Uttara Friends Club ground and Udayan Kindergarten (171-2) earned a comfortable eight-wicket victory against Jan-e-Alam Sarker High School (170-10) at the East End Club ground.

NATIONAL TT
Rachi and Hamlet of Biman clinched the men's doubles title in the Palolic 28th National Table Tennis Championships when they beat Ansar pair Mahub and Mostafa 11-4, 11-7, 10-12, 8-11, 11-8 in the final at the Wooden Floor Gymnasium.

Hamlet then joined Tumpa to lift the mixed-doubles title for Biman after beating Mostafa and Saleha of Ansar.

Hasib however brought consolation for Ansar as he became champion in the boys' singles with 11-8, 7-11, 11-9, 3-11, 11-9, 11-3, 11-7 victory over Shuvon of Biman.

The prize giving ceremony will take place at the same venue today.

EXIM BANK HANDBALL
Dhaka Imperial College, Bir Sheshthra Munshi Abdur Rouf Rifles College and Mirpur Government Bangla College won their respective opening day's matches in the Exim Bank inter-college men's handball competition.

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Bashar pretty pleased

TIGERCRIKET.COM, undated



Habibul Bashar had said before the match that he believed Canada would be a tough opponent but even the Bangladesh captain did not quite anticipate exactly how hard the North Americans would actually come at them.

"They really surprised us," said Bangladesh captain Bashar on phone on Thursday while reflecting on Wednesday's hard-fought 13-run victory against the team they had lost to inexplicably in their last meeting in the 2003 World Cup adding, "They were positive in their batting from the start and that impressed me. Remember they were chasing 279 and that is never easy against any opposition and especially a Test team. This Canadian side definitely looked stronger than the one we lost to in 2003."

Canada on one stage were 178-1 with 14 overs to go and New Zealanders Geoff Barnett and Ian Billcliff had shared 177 for the

second wicket. "We were worried but silently confident at that point because we have pulled things around from such position recently. We knew how to win from such a difficult situation and the bowlers really showed their class during the closing stages of the match. I think the difference was our experience and our winning habit," said Bashar.

The Bangladesh bowling effort left the captain disappointed but he found real positives from the batting.

"We did not bowl and field as we can. This was good preparation as Canada put us under pressure. Normally (Shahriar) Nafees and Aftab (Ahmed) give us a flying start but both batsmen fell without scoring early on and then we were 30-3 when Tamim (Iqbal) got out. So the onus was on the rest of the batsmen and I was mighty pleased with the effort," said Bashar who put on 132 for the fourth wicket with man of the match Shakib Al Hasan who cracked 134 not out, his first ODI hundred and the top individual score for a Bangladeshi batsman in one-day cricket surpassing Nafees's 123.

"Shakib's was a brilliant knock. The way he paced the innings was

remarkable. He never missed putting away the bad balls and towards the end slogged beautifully. Our ploy was not to get bogged down and maintain a good run-rate which we managed to achieve. It was great playing with him and we both felt very comfortable batting together."

There was praise for Mohammad Ashraful also from the captain. Ashraful blasted a 45-ball 60.

"It was good to see Ashraful playing like Ashraful," said Bashar. Bashar made a fine 57 in his 100th ODI appearance and became the first Bangladeshi batsman to complete 2000 ODI runs when he crossed 37. He is the third Bangladeshi player to play in 100 matches after Mohammad Rafique and Khaled Mashud.

"I was not aware of the 100-ODI mark. It was only when a photographer wanted to take some special photos at the toss did I realise that."

The Bangladesh squad left Antigua on Thursday afternoon after training in the morning and is in Barbados now where they will play two more practice games against New Zealand (on March 6) and Scotland (March 8) before

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PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh A opener Mehrab Hossain returns to the pavilion after being dismissed against England A in the first innings of the second four-day match at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogra yesterday.

It's not cricket at times

AFP, New Delhi

Where there's cricket, there's controversy and at the 2003 World Cup the phrase "It's not cricket" vied for attention with on-field contests.

The tournament, jointly hosted by South Africa, Zimbabwe and Kenya, was not only the biggest in the history but also had more than its fair share of controversies, beginning with a drug-ban involving Australian Shane Warne.

Australia got the news before their opening match against Pakistan that the star spinner had been ruled out after testing positive, but it was a tribute to their tenacity that they did not allow it to affect their performance.

The ace leg-spinner was handed a 12-month ban and never played one-day cricket again for Australia.

The tournament had just got off the blocks when cricket was again pushed into the background as Zimbabweans Henry Olonga and Andy Flower wore black armbands to protest the "death of democracy"

in their country.

Both were later driven into cricketing exile, but the Zimbabwe shadow was to fall on the event again when England boycotted their match at Harare on political grounds.

The tournament was more than just a simple contest between bat and ball was proved again when New Zealand refused to play in Nairobi due to security concerns.

The forfeited games helped both Zimbabwe and Kenya to advance to the next round.

Controversies had been shadowing the World Cup ever since South Africa were asked to score an absurd 21 off just one ball in the 1992 rain-hit semifinal against England at Sydney, but the 2003 event took the cake.

Cricket became a vehicle to express various points of views in the age of global television and Australia and the West Indies were doing the same when they boycotted their opening games in Sri Lanka in 1996 due to security fears.

So unsatisfactory was the tournament format then that the forfeitures did not affect the qualifying chances of both the teams, with the West Indies going on to make the semifinals and Australia the final.

The 1996 edition also had a dubious first to its credit -- an abandoned match due to riots in the stadium.

India were facing defeat at 120-8 chasing 252 in the semifinal against Sri Lanka at the Eden Gardens in Calcutta when the riots broke out, forcing match-referee Clive Lloyd to award to game to Sri Lanka.

The spectators, annoyed with the hosts' dismal batting performance, threw missiles on to the field and lit fires in the stands, damaging in the process India's reputation as a sporting nation.

"It was a sad day for cricket and for the people of Calcutta. The

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PHOTO: INTERNET

England all-rounder Andrew Flintoff and seamer Jon Lewis (R) share a light moment as they board a plane for the West Indies at Gatwick Airport in London on Thursday.

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