

Shukur passes away in NY

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh-born sports journalist Abdus Shukur died last Saturday in New York after long suffering from liver diseases. He was 50.

Shukur, who left behind his wife, four sons and three daughters, had been admitted to a Bronx hospital a week earlier. His namaj-e-janaja was held on the same night at the Bronx Parkchester mosque.

Shukur, who was the treasurer of Bangladesh Sports Writers Association (BSWA), worked for the Daily Banglar Bani in Bangladesh.

The BSWA expressed deep sympathy for the bereaved family and prayed for the salvation of the departed soul.

Bollywood cash in on Cup

AFP, Mumbai

India's film industry is to take advantage of World Cup fever to release a pair of cricket-themed movies in the coming weeks, according to production houses in Mumbai.

With the ninth World Cup underway in the Caribbean, Bollywood is preparing to woo audiences with movies featuring Indian ace-spinner Anil Kumble and well-known cricket commentator Harsha Bhogle.

Bhogle appears as himself in "Hat Trick", which is about relationships between people who hold different views about the game.

"Indians are cricket crazy, so we thought it was appropriate to release the movie coinciding with the World Cup," "Hat Trick" director Milan Luthria told AFP.

"We are completing the shoot for a cricket anthem, which will be used in the movie.

"As a film maker I try and explore different themes and genres. It was time to do a sports-linked story," Luthria added.

Kumble, the lead spinner in the 15-member Indian squad currently touring the Caribbean, plays a cameo role in the soon-to-be-released "Meerabai Not Out."

The movie stars popular television actress Mandira Bedi, a surprise star host on a Sony Entertainment cricket television show.

Mandira plays an unmarried teacher in her 30s who is passionate about cricket.

"I have given up a glamorous image in the movie," Mandira said.

"I am a complete cricket fan as much as others are. People should be able to relate to it."

Sports-linked themes have rarely fared well in Bollywood, although "Iqbal", a movie about a mute boy who makes it big in cricket, won rave reviews from critics in 2005.

Other sports-related films scheduled for release in India this year include the big-budget production "Chak del India" (Shine on India), which stars Shah Rukh Khan as a dishonoured hockey player who returns to the game after seven years as a coach to the national women's team.

Mickey warns of minnows

AFP, Basseterre

South African coach Mickey Arthur Tuesday warned his team not to slip-up in their matches against minnows Netherlands and Scotland before they take on Australia in the World Cup.

"I have always described the games against the Netherlands and Scotland as two scary games and we don't want any slip-ups in these games," Arthur told reporters at team's hotel on Tuesday.

South Africa, who recently deposed world champions Australia as the world's top team, had their first workout at the Conaree stadium on the outskirts of Basseterre on Tuesday.

They open their campaign with a Group A match against the Netherlands on Friday.

Defending champions Australia and Scotland, the two other teams in Group A, meet on Wednesday.

South Africa, who have never won the World Cup since their re-admittance to international cricket in 1992, had a lacklustre build-up to the tournament as they struggled in their warm-up matches.

They were given some worrying moments by debutants Ireland before they managed to register an unimpressive 35-run win. They then went down to Pakistan by seven wickets in their second warm-up match.

Arthur, however, believed the real competition would mean something else to his team.

"We have given the guys a little bit of leeway up until now, but this is now time to start the real competition and we are really keen that it gets underway," said Arthur.

South Africa's real test will come against Australia on March 24 in a match which decide who tops the Group A. The top two teams advance to the next round Super Eights with the winners of that crucial match taking their points with them into the second stage.



PHOTO: AFP

JUST PAST HIM! Sri Lanka new boy Chamara Silva dives in vain during a training session in Couva in central Trinidad and Tobago on Wednesday.

McGrath eyes Akram feat

AFP, Basseterre



Australian pacer Glenn McGrath wants to finish his career in record-breaking fashion by overtaking Pakistan's Wasim Akram as the World Cup's most successful bowler.

The 37-year-old retired from Test cricket with 563 wickets to his name after helping Australia to a 5-0 Ashes whitewash of England earlier this year.

Now he needs another ten victims to equal Wasim's all-time World Cup tally of 55 wickets.

"I noticed I'm number two in World Cup wickets. Wasim, who I think was one of the best bowlers of all time, is on top with 55 so it would be nice to get a couple in front by the end of the tournament," McGrath told reporters here on Tuesday.

Wasim, arguably the best left-arm seamer the world has seen, played five World Cups between 1987 to 2003 and helped Pakistan to the title in 1992.

McGrath said he is looking forward to the start of the World Cup. "It is seven weeks of good cricket between now and then, so I want to play some good cricket and comfortably hang up my boots."

Two-time champions Australia open their title defence with a Group A match against Scotland at Warner Park here on Wednesday.

South Africa, who have deposed

Australia as the world number one ranked team, and the Netherlands are the two other teams in the group.

The top two teams qualify for the next round Super Eights.

McGrath said he was feeling fine ahead of the opening match.

"My body is feeling really good, the mind's hanging in there and will hopefully follow suit. I want to get through this tournament. Then, come May 1, I will think about retirement."

"This is a major tournament and every team is looking to start well. We're ranked number two in the world and that's not a position we find ourselves in too often. We'd rather be back at number one, that's what we're aiming for."

Australia had a miserable last few weeks before coming to the Caribbean when they lost five wickets in a row and were also plagued by injuries to key players.

They lost their spearhead Brett Lee who was ruled out with an ankle injury and Matthew Hayden and Andrew Symonds are both fighting for full fitness.

But the Australians bounced back impressively last week by winning both of their warm-up matches, including a clinical five-wicket win over arch-foes England.

"The way we played against England in St Vincent was back to business as usual and hopefully we continue from there," said McGrath.

"The two warm-up games show the preparation has been perfect and we have adjusted to the wickets."

"We hope to keep improving, we've got Scotland first and then Holland. The aim of this tournament is to peak for the final. We lost five in a row, so we start at the bottom and hope to finish at the top in the end."

McGrath meanwhile fired the first salvo at rivals South Africa, whom they meet on March 24, saying the Proteas do not handle pressure well.

"I have always felt they're a team that don't handle pressure as well as the Australian team. A fact that they are ranked no.1 now means a lot more pressure to hold that position and we'll see what happens."

"I wouldn't say they are chokers but the World Cup is the big scene and we are ready for them."

McGrath, who urged his captain to use him as new-ball bowler in Lee's absence, said he would be happy in any role.

"I think to me it's what's best for the team. Twenty overs of powerplay does change the game, and with (Shaun) Tait coming into the team, he'd probably hope to bowl two or three first up and it would be nice to pick up a wicket with his express pace."

"I think it'll work really well for us."

Smith opens battle

AFP, Basseterre



South Africa skipper Graeme Smith opened the psychological battle with Australian rival Ricky Ponting on Wednesday by insisting that being the best in the world does matter.

Ponting has been keen to stress that his team's demotion from the top of the world rankings for the first time since the system was introduced over four years ago was irrelevant.

Smith, however, is adamant that his team's rise to the top of the pile is reward for years of hard work.

"Quite naturally we are extremely proud of the number one ranking, but that was built up over two years of playing good and tough cricket and we need to do the same in the World Cup," said Smith.

Ponting said that he pays little attention to the rankings which were introduced in 2002.

"I don't know how much attention South Africa pays to those rankings, but I do know that our team doesn't pay too much attention whatsoever," said the captain of the two-time defending World Cup champi-

ons.

"It's a feather in everyone's cap to be part of the number one team in the world, but I can't tell you how many points in front we were, and how many we are behind now, and what it's going to take to get back there now."

"If we are back on top after this World Cup that would be great, but if we are not, we can't do anything about it."

"We want to win every game that we play, and that's the way we train, and we prepare. If we are able to win a few more games in this World Cup, and South Africa does not, we will probably leapfrog them again."

Smith, whose side face Australia in a crucial Group A game here on March 24, also hit back at the critics who claim that his side are chokers.

The tag has arisen because of their dramatic collapse in the 1999 World Cup and their first round elimination on home soil in 2003 when they crashed out after misunderstanding the rain rules in a match with Sri Lanka.

"The chokers' tag is something we have always struggled to get rid of. It is something this team has found quite amusing at times. This team has played perfectly well under pressure and will continue to do so," insisted the skipper.

Meanwhile, South Africa coach

Mickey Arthur has warned his team not to slip-up in their matches against Group A minnows Netherlands and Scotland before they take on Australia.

"I have always described the games against the Netherlands and Scotland as two scary games and we don't want any slip-ups in these games," Arthur said.

South Africa open their campaign with a Group A match against the Netherlands at Warner Park here on Friday.

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Arthur, however, believed the real competition would mean something else to his team.

"We have given the guys a little bit of leeway up until now, but this is now time to start the real competition and we are really keen that it gets underway," said Arthur.

LOCAL SNIPPETS

FROM PAGE 17 (Under-20) basketball tournament from today. Eight teams -- BAF Shaheen School, Green Herald, Notre Dame College, Maple Leaf, St Gregory's School, Chittagong Basketball Training School, Residential Model School -- will take part in the meet which will conclude on March 17 at the Savar sport institute.

FROM PAGE 20 progress from Group D into the Super Eight stage of the competition. Despite the defeat, Inzamam is confident his side will bounce back. "There is something brilliant and magical about playing West Indies in West Indies, but we lost the opening game, and this is not very good," he admitted.

Umpires: Brian Jerling (RSA) and Ian Gould (ENG).

Brothers up in arms

AFP, Kingston

Brothers Niall and Kevin O'Brien will enjoy a slice of history on Thursday when Ireland make their World Cup debut against Zimbabwe at Sabina Park here.

Win or lose, the brothers are already thinking of the future with Niall pondering a move to England's colours just like Ed Joyce, the batsman whose runs helped Ireland make the trip to the Caribbean in the first place.

Joyce is tipped to open the batting for England in the tournament.

"I'd like to follow Joyce. It's a good time to be a keeper in England," said Niall, at 25, the older of the two brothers by three years.

Niall will play the next English county season with Northants after spending two years at Kent as England international Geraint Jones's understudy.

"When Geraint lost his place on the England team, it meant Kent couldn't afford the two of us. I wasn't really surprised, I got lots of chances but never got enough runs," added Niall.

"I'm really looking forward to establishing myself at Northampton. It's not like Kent where I was always going to be number two. I can play for my place. It's great to get a second chance."

With Zimbabwe coming into the tournament in a state of chaos, Ireland fancy their chances of a winning Group D start before taking on heavyweights Pakistan and West Indies.

The Irish don't lack for confidence.

In a World Cup warm-up match last week they reduced world number one South Africa to 92-8 at one stage before going down to a narrow defeat.

"We'll probably be favourites to beat Zimbabwe -- that game is there for the taking," said Niall.

"If we bat first we've got to get a competitive score. If we bowl first we're confident we can chase anything down."

Ireland have already defeated the West Indies in Belfast in 2004 with Niall even having a run-in with Brian Lara.

"Lara was funny," Niall told the Irish Times.

"We had that disagreement in that match and then two days later I turned up to play against him for Kent. I don't think he could believe his eyes. I think he'd seen enough of me!"

"I talked to Dwayne Bravo recently and he said 'Brian said to say hello!' I'm looking forward to seeing him in Jamaica."

Arambagh split

FROM PAGE 17

striker Milon, whose dashing run took him to a one-on-one situation with the rival goalkeeper, saw Piru making a diving save on a dangerous attempt.

A minute later, Sony caught Arambagh keeper Piru napping but the Rahmatganj defender's drive from 20 yards skidded the cross-bar.

After an even battle in the middle, Arambagh came close in the 68th minute but striker Ritun, who earned a first-team place ahead of the hopeless Tabith Awah, set Biketi with a backpass but the Kenyan's curling shot whistled past the far post after beating goalkeeper Apel.

Arambagh, however, should thank their custodian Piru for leaving the ground with one point as he pulled off a spectacular save three minutes from time. It was Babu who found Hanif Pradhan with a cross but the substitute midfielder's superb header was warded off by an equally sparkling Piru.

Level on four points, Brothers Union, Sheikh Russel and Dhaka Mohammedan top the table after two rounds. Abahani, who rested in the second week, will resume their campaign when they host an impressive Chittagong Mohammedan at the start of the third week on Friday.

In the other match, Farashganj travel to Khulna to play the Abahani.

TEAMS

Rahmatganj: Apel, Rezaul, Sony, Shipon, Ruku, Babu, Emon, Imrul (Hanif), Mehdi, Milon and Rizvi.

Arambagh: Piru, Ramjan, Biketi, Akram, Sharif, Monu, Malay (Nurul Islam), Zuku, Badambuze, Morshed and Ritun.

Mum's pride

FROM PAGE 17 here on Thursday, is taking his newfound fame in his stride.

"He didn't talk too much (about it), but he doesn't talk too much anyhow," said his mother. "His actions speak louder than words."

The left-arm spinner has already created a little bit of sporting history for his country.

Last year, he became the first Bermudian player to snare five wickets in a limited-overs international, when he opened the bowling against Kenya in Nairobi, finishing with five for 53 from his allotment of 10 overs.

'India ready to play'

AFP, Port of Spain



India coach Greg Chappell says his team are gearing up for their World Cup campaign in the Caribbean with a confident and relaxed frame of mind.

"Whatever the conditions are, they will vary from venue to venue and that's going to be part of the challenge, as it is in any World Cup," Chappell said after his team's first practice session here.

"We will have to bat (on different pitches) as every team will. Not every wicket is same and not all conditions around the world are same. That's what sort out better teams from others. We are looking forward to our first game."

The 1983 champions open their Cup campaign against Bangladesh at the Queen's Park Oval here on Saturday. Sri Lanka and debutants Bermuda are other sides in Group B, with the top two advancing to the next Super Eight stage.

"We have looked at our group and we know what we have got to do. We have got three good games coming up and that should help

prepare us go further," said Chappell, a former Australian Test captain.

The Indian coach said the team had been looking forward to the group matches after having spent a peaceful time in Montego Bay last week, getting used to the conditions.

"The guys have enjoyed a few days of peace and quiet before the tournament, so in a way that's been good. Now, everyone is keen for the tournament to start," said Chappell.

"It's been a good preparation. We have been happy with the time in Montego Bay. It was a chance for us to get used to the conditions in a measured way without having to rush anything."

"We've have been practising, relaxing, swimming, sailing and snorkelling. We have been doing things you would expect to do in the West Indies, things that sometimes the guys don't get an opportunity to do."

Chappell believed it was an essential part of preparations for the mega one-day event, which opened in Jamaica on Tuesday with the West Indies beating Pakistan.

"It's been a nice change of pace from the point of view of what happens on a normal tour, particularly in

that when they come back to the ground they are fresh and really keen to go out there and do well."

David's team arrived here on Monday for their Group B matches against Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and debutants Bermuda, with the top two sides qualifying for the next Super Eight stage.

They play their first game against Bangladesh at the Queen's Park Oval here on Saturday.

David said he expected his team to play hard cricket, irrespective of the opposition.

"I expect the team to put up a very professional and clinical performance, irrespective of who we play against. We respect Bangladesh. We have seen what they have done against New Zealand," he said.

"We have to be switched on for that game. I expect everyone to be

India where you are playing every three days. It's very hard to fit in some relaxation," he said.

"So it's been good for the guys to have that opportunity to change of pace, but not so much that it distracts them from what they are doing."

Chappell was satisfied with his team's performances in the warm-up games, saying they made the most of the opportunities. India won both of their matches, beating the Netherlands and the West Indies.

"In warm-up games, you are trying to do different things and I think we got most of things we wanted from these matches," he said.

"I don't think you can take anything from the results as such, but the games were an opportunity for the bowlers to bowl and the batters to bat and getting used to the conditions."

"We are now ready to go. We are looking forward to the main competition, but there's no rush for that either. We know we have got a few days here and we have got our plans for those few days."

Dravid's memo to 'mates

AFP, Port of Spain



India captain Rahul Dravid has told his teammates to soak up the World Cup atmosphere in the Caribbean, but without losing focus.

"The World Cup is about working hard and preparing right. It's also about ensuring we have a downtime as well. We relax and enjoy the atmosphere. We enjoy the World Cup because it comes once in four years," he said.

"I'd like my boys to soak up the atmosphere and to soak up everything that goes around the event, but obviously work very hard."

"We have to ensure we give the boys enough time to relax and take their minds away from cricket so

switched on for every game in the World Cup."

Bangladesh pulled off a major upset when they beat New Zealand by two wickets in a warm-up game at Bridgetown in Barbados last week.

Dravid said his team had been looking forward to playing against Bangladesh.

"We are happy to be in Trinidad. We do enjoy a lot of support here. We are looking forward to playing that game and I think the atmosphere will be very exciting," said the Indian captain.

India were concerned over the form of a couple of players, including opener Virender Sehwag, but the captain said the team were very close to solving the problems ahead of their campaign.

"It's not only India, but other sides also will have one or two things they might still want to sort out or one or two players who might not be in form. You can't have 15 players in form. If you have, it's amazing," he said.

"It's up to others to make up for it if one or two guys are not doing well. We are very happy with the way our team have shaped up, the preparations we had. I feel most of the issues are sort of getting resolved."

Dravid said he also expected his lower-order batsmen to contribute because they could find themselves in a situation where they had to deliver.

"There might be stages in a game where they have to make crucial contributions. There might be one match in the tournament or two, but they could be most important games," he said.

"Credit to them that a lot of them have really improved. They are really working hard on it. We expect runs from them."

A new hangover

FROM PAGE 20

called the triumph, 'Sweet victory'.

"For the West Indies, the curtain-raiser was more than encouraging, and more than exciting. It was simply positive and really thrilling."

In Bridgetown, Barbados, venue for the final on April 28, the Daily Nation newspaper hailed the victory as a 'Sweet One'.

"The Caribbean flavour, flair, and frenzy engulfed Sabina Park to provide the Cricket World Cup with the dream start every West Indian was longing for," it said.

"West Indians celebrated a victory over Pakistan in a manner in which only Caribbean people can, amidst uncontrollable merriment among an almost packed ground of 20,000."

"As Brian Lara's men moved towards a 54-run triumph, those in the stands at the renovated ground screamed themselves hoarse in acknowledging a win that launched the 'West Indies' bid to become the first home team to win the World Cup."

In Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, the Trinidad Express trumpeted, 'On a

high!'

"In each of the first two World Cups, the West Indies beat Pakistan. Each time they went on to lift the trophy," said the newspaper.

"A virtually full arena, including 17 surviving members of those Cup winning teams of 1975 and 1979, watched Brian Lara's side give the host nation the start they desperately wanted and early leadership of Group D."

"They did so by putting up a competitive total of 241 for nine in their 50 overs. They did it with committed bowling throughout, and with a near flawless fielding display, the kind that typified Clive Lloyd's World Cup winners. You could say they were inspired."

"And in Dwayne Smith, they got a hero for the occasion. In him, the present-day West Indians found their Collis King."

King -- with whom Smith is often compared -- was instrumental in the West Indies winning the 1979 final, when he slugged 86 to put them back on track for victory over England.

West Indies floor Pakistan

FROM PAGE 20

the threat of Danish Kaneria with an over in which he struck the leg-spin bowler for two sixes and a four.

At this stage, Lara was a mere passenger, and he was overshadowed by Samuels before he was caught behind off Hafeez for 37 in the 42nd over.

Hafeez also had Samuels caught at long-on in the 44th over to leave West Indies 181 for five and a little unsteady.

Dwayne Smith quickly eradicated the instability with a quickfire 32 from 15 balls, hitting a couple of huge sixes off Hafeez and Iftikhar before he was caught at mid-on in the penultimate over.

That left Bravo and the bowlers to get West Indies a competitive total, and Corey Collymore brought things to an exciting conclusion, when he swatted Iftikhar for a six over long-on.

WEST INDIES-PAKISTAN SCOREBOARD

FROM PAGE 20					
Danish Kaneria	9	2	45	1	5.00
Mohammad Hafeez	9	0	39	2	4.33
Shoaib Malik	4	0	24	0	6.00
PAKISTAN	R	B	4s	6s	
Nazir c Ramdin b Powell	6	3	0	1	
Hafeez c Lara b Powell	11	28	2	0	
Younis Khan c Ramdin b Taylor	9	13	2	0	
Yousuf c Ramdin b Smith	37	72	1	0	
Inzamam lbw b Smith	36	65	4	0	
Malik c Chanderpaul b Collymore	62	54	6	1	
Akmal c Bravo b Smith	0	1	0	0	
Navedul b Bravo	11	29	0	0	
Anjum c Lara b Bravo	11	18	0	0	
Gul c & b Bravo	0	1	0	0	
Kaneria not out	0	0	0	0	