

Mohammedan's second date in Chittagong

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammedan will face Abahani in today's B. League match but not their perennial foes from the capital. The Dhaka giants rather face Chittagong Abahani in the opening game of the 8th week at the MAAziz Stadium.

It will be Mohammedan's second trip to the port city after drawing their Chittagong namesake in the fifth week.

The remaining matches of this week have been rescheduled to accommodate the three-day National Athletics Championships that begin today at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

FIXTURES

Apr 20: Ctg Abahani v Mohammedan (MAAziz Stadium)
Apr 23: Farashganj v Ctg Mohammedan (BNS)
Apr 24: Brothers v Abahani (BNS); Khulna Abahani v Muktiyoddha (Khulna)
Apr 25: Arambagh v Russel (BNS)

Nat'l athletics from today

UNB, Dhaka

The 32nd National Athletics Championships begin today at the newly laid athletics track at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Youth and Sports Adviser Tapan Chowdhury will formally inaugurate the three-day meet organised by Bangladesh Amateur Athletics Federation.

About 600 athletes representing 50 districts, eight services teams and six universities will vie for 36 gold medals -- 22 for men and 14 for women.

B'link cricket in Pabna

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

The bangalink Tiger Cup Cricket Tournament will start today here at the Pabna Edward College ground.

Pabna District Sports Association will organise the tournament with bangalink, one of the leading cellular phone houses, sponsoring the month long event where ten first division clubs will compete.

"Bangalink has been trying to develop the sports sectors, especially cricket in Bangladesh. We have sponsored the national team but now we are supporting local cricket to develop the infrastructure," told Rajshahi regional commercial officer of Bangalink Jahiruddin Nadif at a press conference at the local Press Club auditorium yesterday.

Bangalink will sponsor local cricket gradually across the country, Nadif added.

Pabna DSA secretary Abu Ishraq Shamim and other officials were also present.

Time for a scrap

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final, but Australia captain Ricky Ponting is in no doubt about their quality.

"They love a fight, they love a scrap," Ponting said.

New Zealand all-rounder Scott Styris is averaging over 100 with the bat in the Caribbean after scoring a century and four fifties.

Bond, meanwhile, has taken 12 wickets at under 25 apiece in an attack that also features experienced left-arm spinner Daniel Vettori.

"Styris has been good for them so far, Bond's obviously very good and Vettori is always good in these sorts of conditions," Ponting added.

TEAMS (PROBABLE)

AUSTRALIA: Adam Gilchrist (wk), Matthew Hayden, Ricky Ponting (capt), Michael Clarke, Andrew Symonds, Brad Hodge/Shane Watson, Michael Hussey, Brad Hogg, Nathan Bracken, Shaun Tait, Glenn McGrath

NEW ZEALAND: Stephen Fleming (capt), Peter Fulton, Ross Taylor, Scott Styris, Craig McMillan, Jacob Oram, Brendon McCullum (wk), Daniel Vettori, Brendon McCullum (wk), Daniel Vettori, Shane Bond

Umpires: Aleem Dar (PAK), Asad Rauf (PAK)

Mushy bowls

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"Saqlain joining us is good news," said Mushtaq.

"He is very hungry and passionate and when you have that as well as the talent you will always expect him to deliver the best."

"He has a great record in international and county cricket. He has had some injury problems but when he gets fully fit he has the potential to have the same impact as I have had for Sussex. And he is bowling his doors again which is great news."

Two other members of Pakistan's World Cup squad were also in action in the county championship on Wednesday.

Azhar Mahmood took 3-48 for Surrey at The Oval but Yorkshire still made 390-8.

Spinner Danish Kaneria took 4-101 for Essex before Derbyshire finished on top making for 405 for six at Chelmsford.



Malinga up for semi

AFP, St George's



Sri Lanka captain Mahela Jayawardene is confident of having fast bowler Lasith Malinga fit for Tuesday's World Cup semifinal in Jamaica.

Malinga, who has taken 15 wickets at under 15 apiece at the tournament, has missed Sri Lanka's last three matches after damaging left ankle ligaments.

His latest absence didn't prove costly, Sri Lanka dismissing Ireland for 77 in their final Super Eights match at Grenada's National Stadium here Wednesday with paceman Farveez Maharoof (four for 25) and Muttiah Muralidaran (four for 19) doing the damage.

But while Sri Lanka quick Dilhara Fernando was nursing an ankle problem that saw him miss the Ireland match, Jayawardene was confident that Malinga, whose slingy action makes him difficult to face, would return for a last four clash where the 1996 champions are likely to face New Zealand.

"He's probably 90 percent okay," Jayawardene said of Malinga. "We probably should have played him today (Wednesday) but we didn't want to take the risk."

"We have almost a week before the next game. He's bowled 10 overs in the nets this (Wednesday) morning. We just need to make sure he gradually comes up. We don't want to take too many risks. He should be ready to go in the semifinals, definitely."

However, Jayawardene was less certain regarding Fernando's fitness.

"Dilhara played against Australia with an ankle problem. He had two injections in it and he needs to prove his fitness before the semifinals," said the skipper.

The Sabina Park pitch is likely to be the bounciest Sri Lanka have encountered so far during a World Cup played on mainly slow, low tracks.

But Jayawardene said his side would relish the conditions.

"We like bouncy wickets," said the top-order strokeplayer, 39 not out against Ireland. "Like any other cricketers in the world, our bats-

men love to play on bouncy tracks when the ball is coming on."

"Obviously it's very hard for batsmen to score runs when it's not coming on and we've got a very decent bowling attack to complement those conditions."

"We just need to go to Jamaica and have a look at it and adjust to it. That's what we've done all through the World Cup."

Meanwhile, Jayawardene was pleased by the ruthlessness way Sri Lanka had seen off an Ireland team that had upset the formbook dramatically by beating Pakistan in the group phase and defeating Bangladesh in the Super Eights.

"They had a brilliant world cup and we had to make sure we played some really good cricket," said Jayawardene. "I'm not taking anything away from my boys, they've played really good cricket."

"He added: "The semifinal is a very big hurdle for us to jump. We're looking forward to it. When we left Sri Lanka this was the target we set, getting to the semifinals and looking forward from that."

"We've come a long way and there's no looking back for us now. We'll give it our best shot."

Door ajar for Marvan

AFP, Colombo



The wretched form of Sri Lanka's left-handed opener Upul Tharanga has opened the possibility of former captain Marvan Atapattu making a comeback in the semifinal clash with New Zealand.

Tharanga managed just 17 runs in his last three outings and his longest innings lasted no more than 22 balls - a huge cause for concern.

Atapattu is a member of Sri Lanka's 15-member squad, but has not played in this World Cup.

"That's something we'll have to think about. He's hitting the ball pretty well but he's just not spending time out there in the middle," Sri Lankan captain Mahela Jayawardene told journalists in

Grenada.

Siddath Wettimuny, a highly acclaimed opening batsman in the 1980s, said showing Tharanga the door to make way for Atapattu was "a very tough call to make."

"It is the people on tour who are aware if Marvan has maintained the required levels of fitness and if he is batting well in the nets," Wettimuny told AFP in Colombo.

The former captain has not figured in any of the games so far and seems set to repeat the 1996 record of not playing a single game despite being a member of the champion squad.

Wettimuny, also a former chief selector, added: "We all would like to see him (Atapattu) back in the side, but to replace Upul Tharanga despite his poor run is not the easiest of decisions to be made."

But former opener Romesh Kaluwitharana disagreed.

"Marvan is a classy player who is

experienced enough to handle any pressure. He should definitely be given the chance in the semifinal. Upul has done well but is not doing so right now," Kaluwitharana said.

Tony Opatha, Sri Lanka's main strike bowler in the 1970s, said, "it is time we said 'thank you' to Upul Tharanga and drafted Marvan into the side. Sri Lankan top order needs stability and Marvan is the man to provide it."

Premasara Epasinghe, a veteran cricket broadcaster, said it might be too late to make a dramatic change at the top of the order.

But Bandula Warnaarapura, the island's first Test captain, said Atapattu should be included.

"A team has 15 members in a squad to go for replacements if the need be. Upul has failed so naturally he should be replaced," he said.

Fletcher to quit after WC

AFP, London



Duncan Fletcher will quit as England coach after their last World Cup match against West Indies in Barbados on Thursday.

Peter Moores, currently the England Academy coach, will take over on a temporary basis, said the report.

David Morgan, the chief executive of the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB), is due to give a news conference in Bridgetown later Thursday to discuss the team's pitiful World Cup campaign which saw Michael Vaughan's side fail to reach the semifinals.

Fletcher, 58, has been England coach since 1999 but has been under pressure since the winter when Australia reclaimed the Ashes in a 5-0 whitewash.

England's exit from the World Cup was confirmed on Tuesday when they were defeated by nine wickets by South Africa who claimed the last semi-final spot.

The names of potential successors are already being thrown into the ring.

Former England captain Ian Botham believes former Australia Test star and current Sri Lanka coach Tom Moody would be the ideal replacement.

"Fletcher must go now. As the most powerful England coach of all

time - with the right to pull players out of county games and total control over the team's preparation - he must carry the can for this shambles," Botham wrote in the Daily Mirror.

"He's done a fantastic job in the past with the Test side and we will forever be grateful to him for the 2005 Ashes triumph, but Fletcher has gone past his sell-by date."

"The next move is staring the ECB in the face: they should present Fletcher with the carriage clock, pay him off with heartfelt thanks for his services over the last eight years and go out and hire Tom Moody as his replacement."

"Moody is a former World Cup winner with Australia, he has galvanised Sri Lanka and my guess is he'll be in the market for a job after the World Cup. Especially the England job."

Another former England captain Geoff Boycott said that changes are also needed at the very top of the game in England and nominated Mike Gatting as a new chairman of selectors.

"Fletcher has always got what he wanted: that is the bottom line. Even David Graveney, the chairman of selectors, mumbles privately about some of the players Fletcher picks, but he is not prepared to stand up to him," Boycott wrote in the Daily Telegraph.

"England need a stronger man in this job, someone like Mike Gatting, who should be responsible for picking the team and giving it to the captain and coach to get on with. That is the way the Aussies do it."

Boycott also questioned the future

Selector cuts all-rounders

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's new chief cricket selector has delivered a snub to the squad's all-rounders, saying his priority will be to pick specialists to improve performance, reports said Thursday.

Former Test off-spinner Salahuddin Ahmad said finding a good opening bat, pair and raising players' fitness levels were also important.

"My first priority would be to pick specialists instead of all-rounders. A specialist has more chances to deliver and improve his game," Salahuddin told The News, a leading English daily.

His comments will alarm all-rounders such as Shahid Afridi, whose big-hitting style has not always been matched by recent performances, Abdul Razzaq and Yasir Afzal.

They could equally apply to batsmen and occasional off-spinner Shoaib Malik, who is tipped to be named later Thursday as the new Pakistan captain after the nation's World Cup debacle.

"I am not against all-rounders but I do not like 'makeshift' arrangements," Salahuddin, appointed by the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Wednesday, told Dawn, Pakistan's oldest English daily.

"A cricketer must and should be selected for his specialisation in one department and his additional qualities in other departments should be treated as secondary."

Salahuddin said he wanted to solve a long-term problem for Pakistan by finally finding a decent duo at the top of the batting order.

"I always think there is a need to develop a trustworthy opening pair. A good batting line-up always has that quality," he told the News.

"Pakistan have always struggled in this front."

AND V SRI LANKA SCOREBOARD

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5-48 (N O'Brien), 6-48 (Carroll), 7-49 (Johnston), 8-49 (K O'Brien), 9-54 (McCallan), 10-77 (Langford-Smith)

Bowler

W/NB

Chaminda Vaas

7 3 10 0

Nuwan Kulasekara

10 3 25 41nb

Farveez Maharoof

5 0 19 42w

SRI LANKA

Upul Tharanga c William Porterfield b Boyd Rankin

0 7 0 0

Sanath Jayasuriya not out

24 20 3 1

Kumar Sangakkara c Kenneth Carroll b Dave Langford-Smith