

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

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

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

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

Pabna DSA secretary Abu Ishhaq 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, James Franklin, Jeetan Patel, 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 doosra 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.



PHOTO: STAR

Muktiyoddha striker Alfaz (R) and fullback Hassan Al Mamun (C) eye the ball during their B.League match against Brothers Union at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Fighting pace with pace

AFF, St George's



There are few more thrilling sights in cricket than watching a fast bowler in action.

That's why the crowd at Grenada's National Stadium on Friday will be doubly fortunate when champions Australia and New Zealand wrap up their World Cup Super Eights campaign.

For in Australia's Shaun Tait and New Zealand's Shane Bond they will be watching two of the outstanding quicks in the Caribbean.

Tait, Australia's strike bowler in the absence of the injured Brett Lee, is third in the list of the tournament's leading bowlers with 16 wickets at 22.12 while Bond is tenth with 12 at under 13 apiece.

Both right-arm bowlers are capable of making breakthroughs with the new ball and coming back

later to take important wickets in the middle of an innings.

However, the similarities end there.

Tait, 24, still mainly relies on sheer pace generated by a huge shoulder turn in an unorthodox action which has been likened to that of Aussie pace great Jeff Thomson, who terrorised the world's best batsmen during the 1970s.

Bond, as befits a former policeman, is less wayward and bowls a generally fuller length with fewer short-pitched deliveries

Not as quick as Tait, the greater experience of the injury-plagued, 31-year-old Bond, who has played 66 one-day internationals compared to the Australian's 12, is seen in his greater variety and mastery of late movement.

However, with Australia's well-balanced pace attack featuring the ever-reliable Glenn McGrath, the leading wicket-taker in the tournament to date with 20, and miserly

left-armer Nathan Bracken, the double-defending champions can unleash Tait without compromising his speed for greater accuracy.

That can make life tough for wicket-keeper Adam Gilchrist who, during Monday's defeat of Sri Lanka, saw Tait bowl six wides including one that went way out of his reach on its way to the boundary.

Not that the Australia vice-captain was complaining.

"There's not many things that can scare you more as a batsman than raw pace, and he's got that," said Gilchrist.

"He's been known to bowl the odd wide here and there and that's what's going to come from that style of bowling but we feel the impact he has makes it well worth taking on those couple of extras."

Bond, although possessing a far more orthodox action, is unusual among modern quicks as New Zealand captain Stephen Fleming explained.

"He's a fine bowler and he swings the ball in, a lot of fast bowlers these days shape the ball away," said Fleming.

"He gets prodigious movement with the new ball that provides a challenge to any top order. He's been able to use the inswing to a lot of effect and he's developed other subtleties."

Bond enjoys the rare distinction amongst current players of having a better one-day record against Australia than for his career as a whole with 34 wickets at an average of under 14 apiece, compared to 124 wickets at 19 against all-comers.

And three of his four hauls of five wickets or more in an innings in one-dayers have come against Australia, including a dramatic return of six for 23 during the 2003 World Cup in Port Elizabeth.

But, in what could be a worrying omen for New Zealand fans, Australia still won that match by 96 runs.

Reds blank Brothers

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right-side lob by Monwar, only to see Titumir react in time to flick it over.

Tapu fluffed another opportunity before Ibrahim separated the two sides with a first-time volley in the 71st minute.

Muktiyoddha skipper Moni sped down the left to send a pinpoint cross at the far post where unguarded Ibrahim made no mistake to blast a right-footer into the top left corner.

Brothers had no luck as Moroccan playmaker Hicham Inani's dipping shot from 50 yards took an awkward bounce inside the box and came off the crossbar. Junior then failed to keep his header on target from two yards after meeting a superb curling corner by Mamun in the 82nd minute.

Once again, Brothers left wide space in the rear while attacking and Arman Mia initiated a counter attack that sealed the victory in the very next minute. Arman found Ibrahim at the right flank and the Moroccan had a free run before cutting a waist-high cross that was faintly cleared by Ali towards the path of Moni, whose low drive from the top of the area went in off a deflection of Shuvra.

"We started casually and the players did not have the control I had wanted. There was also no acceleration. At half time, I asked my players to concentrate and wait for chances. I knew that the Brothers defence would give us chances," said Muktiyoddha coach Abu Yusuf.

"They left the flanks open and my players finally utilised the opportunities," said the former national footballer, who was happy to see Ibrahim improving. "His infiltration was better after the break and I believe Muktiyoddha are getting better match by match."

When asked why Tapu -- whose inclusion made the Oranges stronger -- was not used earlier, Brothers coach Nayeemuddin informed that the striker was not yet fit to play a full match.

"We will learn from our mistakes," said Nayeemuddin whose side face another difficult opposition in Abahani next week.

Yellow card: Inani (Brothers)

TEAMS
MUKTIJODDHA: Titumir, Hassan Al Mamun, Rajani, Ghansah, Titu, Arman Aziz, Ibrahim, Arman, Munna (Maruf), Alfaz (Enamul) and Moni.
BROTHERS: Ali, Rony, Jewel, Shuvra, Masud Rana, Monwar (Jalal), Inani, Rintu, Faisal (Tapu), Manju (Mamun) and Junior.
Referee: Tayeb Hasan.

TOP SCORERS
Double hat-trick: Paul (Mohammedan v Rahmatganj)
Hat-trick: Alfaz (Muktiyoddha) v Rahmatganj
6 goals: Paul (Mohammedan)
5 goals: Nicodemus (Arambagh)
4 goals: Junior (Brothers), Moni (Muktiyoddha)
3 goals: Younes (Russel), Alfaz (Muktiyoddha), Prashanta (Khulna Abahani), Robin (Farashganj)
2 goals: Yusuf (Ctg Mohammedan), Enock (Brothers), Emily, Ibrahim (Abahani), Ighir (Russel), Ibrahim (Muktiyoddha)

Pak win on

FROM PAGE 24
ably what it was."

But he said Ireland were glad to have faced Murali, albeit in a match that finished in under 38 overs.

"It's been a credit to us that every team has put their best team out against us because they know that we can play cricket and are potentially a massive banana skin.

"It's been fantastic. I certainly hope people don't remember us from that last game because we've had one helluva of a tournament."

"If someone had said to me that we would have been beaten by eight wickets by Sri Lanka in the last game of the Super Eights before I left to come here, I would have taken that."

Johnston said the sadness of Wednesday's defeat was that it denied departing coach Adrian Birrell a proper send-off in his final match in charge before returning to his native South Africa after five years with the team.

"This tournament, and especially the Super Eights campaign, was something we wanted to dedicate to him and what he has done for us and for Irish cricket," said Johnston.

Phil Simmons is set to replace Birrell, but Johnston said he wasn't sure if he would be playing under the former West Indies batsman.

"I don't know if he wants me to be a part of it or if he's going to get rid of the dead wood and get the young boys in. I don't really know if I'm going to go on, it might be my last game, I'll talk to my family."

Malik made

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undergo elbow surgery.

The only other blight on his career so far was when Pakistan cricket chiefs banned him for one Test in 2005 for throwing a domestic game in protest after his team was penalised for a slow over rate in another match.

Malik later apologised.

Immediate reaction to the appointment was mixed, with former Pakistan paceman Sarfraz Nawaz saying: "The decision is disappointing."

However former PCB chief Tauqir Zia played down Malik's inexperience. "It appears to be a good choice. He is not very new, he has been playing for quite some time," he told a private television channel.

Former captains Imran Khan and Intikhab Alam on Wednesday said that choosing Malik would be a risk because of his age.

Farveez stakes

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said Ireland captain Trent Johnston. "But Sri Lanka showed why they are one of the tournament favourites."

The captain now wants to see Ireland build on their achievements here.

"The goal when we came here was to show to people that we can play cricket away from our own backyard. I hope people won't judge us on our performances against Australia and Sri Lanka."

Sri Lanka opener Sanath Jayasuriya, a veteran of the 1996 World Cup winning team, paid tribute to his team's bowlers.

"Vaas and Maharoof bowled well up front and later on Murali finished off the other parts," said Jayasuriya.

"Maharoof is a good all-rounder and he did really well. He is coming on and that is good for us."

Jayasuriya said he was pleased with his own performance after he hit 24 not out as Sri Lanka reached their target with a full 40 overs remaining.

"What I want is to perform for my country. I wanted to do my bit and win the game," said the 37-year-old.

"We are thinking about the semifinals and if we do our basics right we have got a chance. Nothing worries us about the Jamaican pitch. If it seems and bounces we have the bowlers to deal with it, and our batsmen would enjoy it too."

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 ruthless 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

AFF, 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 Warnapura, 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

AFF, London



Duncan Fletcher will quit as England coach after their last World Cup match against West Indies in Barbados on Saturday, the BBC reported 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 as a result.

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 way 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 contribution 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 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 Ashes go to it."

Boycott also questioned the future

of Michael Vaughan as one-day skipper after a dreadful run of form. Vaughan has never made a one-day international century.

"Just look at Michael Vaughan, whose position will now have to be seriously considered," added Boycott.

"You cannot keep your place in the one-day side just because you are a good captain, or because you look elegant at the crease, or even because you are playing well in the nets. A team of good-lookingers won't win anything."

"I would give Vaughan another chance in Test matches to see how he goes, but he still has to make runs. His leadership skills are his greatest asset, but even those will be eroded if he becomes a passenger within the side."

Selector cuts all-rounders

AFF, 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 batting 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 Urdu-language 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 Arafat.

They could equally apply to batsman 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 also 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 SCOREBO

| FROM PAGE 24 | | | | |
|---|-----|----|----|------|
| 5-48 (N O'Brien), 6-48 (Carroll), 7-49 (Johnston), 8-49 (K O'Brien), 9-54 (McCallan), 10-77 (Langford-Smith) | | | | |
| Bowler | O | M | R | W |
| W/NB | | | | |
| Chaminda Vaas | 5.4 | 1 | 18 | 11nb |
| Nuwan Kulasekara | 7 | 3 | 10 | |
| Farveez Maharoof | 10 | 3 | 25 | 41nb |
| Muttiah Muralidaran | 5 | 0 | 19 | 42w |
| SRI LANKA | R | B | 4s | 6s |
| 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 10 | 9 | 1 | 0 | |
| Mahela Jayawardene not out | 39 | 27 | 6 | 1 |
| Extras: (wides 5, no balls 3) | 8 | | | |
| Total: (For 2 wickets in 10 overs) | 81 | | | |
| Fall of wickets: 1-1 (Tharanga), 2-25 (Sangakkara) | | | | |
| Did not bat: Chamara Silva, Tillakaratne Dilshan, Russel Arnold, Farveez Maharoof, Chaminda Vaas, Nuwan Kulasekara, Muttiah Muralidaran | | | | |
| Bowler | O | M | R | W |
| W/NB | | | | |
| Boyd Rankin | 4 | 0 | 36 | 1 |
| 3nb, 2w | | | | |
| Dave Langford-Smith | 3 | 0 | 29 | 13w |
| Andre Botha | 1 | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| Kevin O'Brien | 1 | 0 | 4 | 0 |
| Kenneth Carroll | 1 | 0 | 8 | 0 |
| Result: Sri Lanka won by 8 wickets. | | | | |
| Man-of-the-match: Farveez Maharoof. | | | | |
| Toss: Sri Lanka. | | | | |
| Umpires: Mark Benson and Billy Doctrove. | | | | |