

Football back to Kashmir after 30 years

AFP, Srinagar

A major Indian football tournament is returning to Kashmir after nearly three decades amid a decline in insurgency-related violence, officials said Friday.

The Santosh Trophy, a popular national event, will be held in summer capital Srinagar, the urban hub of Kashmir's Muslim insurgency.

The tournament was last held in the scenic Himalayan state in 1978, almost a decade before rebels launched a deadly separatist revolt.

"Allah willing, the competition for Santosh Trophy will be held in Kashmir in July," said Zamir Ahmad, head of Kashmir's football association.

Indian soccer officials visiting to the region to oversee preparations for the event said the competition would help the game in Kashmir.

"Football is the main game here. I am sure if such a mega event is held here, people would get more involved in football," said Subroto Dutta, vice-president of the All India Football Association (AIFA).

"In the near future, I see a very rosy picture for football in Kashmir. We would do all that is needed to rejuvenate the game in Kashmir."

Kashmiri footballers said they were looking forward to the event.

"It will revive old memories and football in Kashmir," said former captain Majeed Kakroo, one of many Kashmiris who played for India.

The number of insurgency-related deaths has dropped from ten a day in 2001 to two in 2007, due to a peace process in place between India and Pakistan since 2004.

Both hold the region in part, but claim it in full. They have fought two of their three wars over Kashmir since gaining independence from Britain in 1947.

Royal invite for India, Pakistan

AFP, London

Charles, the Prince of Wales, has invited the Indian and Pakistani cricket teams to play a one-day international match in Glasgow in July for charity, his official residence confirmed on Thursday.

The match, named the Friendship Cup, aims to raise more than 2.5 million pounds (3.7 million euros, 4.9 million dollars) for charities in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Britain.

Charles, the heir to the throne, came up with the idea as a way to commemorate India and Pakistan celebrating 60 years of independence from Britain.

The match, set for July 3 at the Citylets Titwood in Glasgow, was confirmed by the Board of Cricket Control in India (BCCI), the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), and Cricket Scotland.

"This will be an amazing occasion as both our nations have not met outside the World Cup or the ICC Trophy in the United Kingdom," said Lalit Modi, BCCI vice-president.

Sonargaon closer

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equally combative 4-30 by off-spinner Mustakim.

Quariaj, adjudged man-of-the-match, then hit 33 not out to steer Victoria to 241-7 after opener Imrul Kayes (50), Mahmudullah Riyad (49) and Hasanuzzaman Rosel (40) salvaged the side from a precarious 86-4.

SCORES IN BRIEF

ABAHANI: 248-9 in 50 overs (Sadat 1, Zia 20, Nazim 97, Naem 4, Chandana 57, Shuvu 12, Kuntal 35 n.o., Shahjada 3, Jamil 4, Talha 6, extras 9, Mushtaq 4-37, Masharraf 1-54, Mirad 1-39, Sanwar 1-19).

BIMAN: 250-3 in 46.2 overs (Rokibul 8, Nafis 85, Farhad 127, Mushtaq 6 n.o., Sajjad 9 n.o., extras 15, Shahjada 1-17, Sadat 2-47).

Result: Biman won by seven wickets.

MOHAMMEDAN: 162 all out in 47.3 overs (Rashedul 24, Junaid 11, Sahag 38, Rakesh 5, Faisal 10, Sunny 0, Ariful 11, Rezul 13, Monirul 18, Hasibul 10, Manjurul 3, extras 19, Robin 2-7, Sharif 1-32, Muntasir 2-26, Kapali 1-26, Masudur 2-23).

SONARGAON: 163-4 in 42.5 overs (Opee 3, Al-Shahriar 26, Ilias 39, Kapali 57 n.o., Marshall 17, Dhiman 6 n.o., extras 15, Hasibul 1-31, Sunny 1-30).

Result: Sonargaon won by six wickets.

DOHS: 239 all out in 48.2 overs (Tamim 18, Shamsur 41, Ehsanul 75, Nadir 50, Mahmud 2, Razzak 21, Dollar 50, Shahin 1, Nazmul 5, Nabil 0 n.o., extras 17, Shuvu 1-52, Quariaj 4-36, Sajib 1-35, Mustakim 4-30).

VICTORIA: 241-7 in 47.5 overs (Kayes 50, Nasiruddin 12, Mustakim 11, Rahim 7, Riyad 49, Rosel 40, Quariaj 33 n.o., Milon 6, Sabbir 14 n.o., extras 19, Nazmul 2-42, Tikolo 1-35, Razzak 1-48, Nabil 2-34).

Result: Victoria won by three wickets.



Roger Federer of Switzerland returns the ball to Spaniard David Ferrer in the quarterfinal match of the Hamburg Masters yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Federer in last four

Tennis

AFP, Hamburg

Roger Federer's uncharacteristic struggles continued when he had to fight surprisingly hard to reach the semifinals of the Hamburg Masters with a three-set win over David Ferrer of Spain on Friday.

The world number one had never previously dropped a set in six matches against the 12th-seeded Spaniard, but this time he slipped to within an inch of going break point down in the seventh game of the final set, before surviving 6-3, 4-6, 6-3.

This struggle followed an even tighter three-set battle in Federer's opening match on Wednesday against Juan Monaco, an Argentine ranked outside the top 50, and his loss to an opponent outside the top 50, Filippo Volandri, in the Rome Masters last week.

That setback made it the first time Federer had failed to win a title in four successive tournaments since he became world number one 171 weeks ago.

For a set and a half Federer timed the ball better than at any time since reaching the final in Monte Carlo last month, and he looked well on top of Ferrer until he reached a lead of 4-2 and 30-15 in the second set.

At that stage Federer made one mistake with a forehand and then attempted two ambitious strokes - straightening a diagonal by striking a forehand down the line, and launching a spectacular forehand drive-volley - and saw both go wide.

He had employed what was arguably the right policy - with a perceived need to dominate opponents a little more, especially Rafael Nadal, on the Parisian clay at the French Open starting later this month - but these three mistakes not only cost him his service game, and allowed Ferrer back into the match.

Federer broke at the fifth attempt with a brilliantly angled short backhand cross court which opened up acres of court for an inevitable forehand winner, and then served out for the match without fuss.

Suddenly the hard-running Spaniard began to play more confidently, adding new dimensions to a game which was often based around making forehand drives from almost every position on the court.

Ferrer broke Federer again, courtesy of a net approach and a

nicely angled volley, served out comfortably for the second set, and held on hard throughout the first six games of the third set.

It was then that Federer had an important piece of luck. At 3-3, 30-30 on Federer's serve a Ferrer short slice stayed very low, and Federer only managed to get it over the net via the net cord, whence the ball dropped the dead.

Ferrer hopped and tossed his racket in frustration, and he never got as close to troubling Federer again, despite fighting bravely to save four break points in the next game.

Federer broke at the fifth attempt with a brilliantly angled short backhand cross court which opened up acres of court for an inevitable forehand winner, and then served out for the match without fuss.

The world number one had certainly had his moments despite the disappointing failure to close out the second set, and he can take comfort from the match practice investment of employing a full range of attacking options - and still surviving.

Naranjanj also came close but Sohel Rana failed to beat the rival keeper on a one-on-one situation.

First win

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Cricket

nine minutes with a 30-yard strike at the Sathkira Stadium while Awal and Ripon added the rest late in the second half to hand Gaibandha their first loss in the finals.

Hosts Sathkira's poor run continued as they second attempt to win a match went down the drains following a goalless draw with Narayanganj.

Both teams came to the game after losing their respective openers and the home side fluffed easy chances. Jahirul wasted sitters either side of the break for Sathkira, who were reduced to ten men when Shahjalal was sent off in the 52nd minute.

Naranjanj also came close but Sohel Rana failed to beat the rival keeper on a one-on-one situation.

LOCAL SNIPS

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U-13 CRICKET

CCS defeated Greenfield Spectrum by 73 runs in the Boost Power Cup Under-13 cricket tournament at the Kalabagan Krira Chakra ground. In reply to CCS's 208-6, Greenfield were all out for 135 with man-of-the-match Sayem taking 2-12 after scoring a run-a-ball 30 in the CCS innings.

WOMEN'S CHESS

The Prime Bank second Women's International Rating Chess, organised by Leoline Chess Club, begins today at the Bangladesh Chess Federation hall-room. Interested players have been requested to confirm their entries by 2pm at the federation.

Inzamam

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that Sharma would not be sent to South Africa after all.

"It will be up to the selectors to select me or not. I will feature in the domestic cricket and have been training to play Test cricket. This committee cannot decide my future," he said.

The PCB inquiry, led by former Test player Ijaz Butt, also found that poor planning and lack of discipline were behind Pakistan's performance in the Caribbean.

Inzamam was replaced as captain by Shoaib Malik, who on Friday leads the team in the first of three one-day games against Sri Lanka in Abu Dhabi.

Inzamam also questioned the neutrality of the three-man report committee that produced the stinging criticism.

"I know it will sound bitter to them but the presence of two paid members in the probe committee raises doubts over the impartiality of the report," the burly 37-year-old batsman told the BBC's Urdu service.

"That could only be accepted if players had complained that I acted like one."

"This is nothing new in Pakistan cricket. When the team loses, all the blame is put on others, and I was ready for that because it happened in the past," he said, referring to Pakistan's equally dismal 2003 World Cup.

"If had power as captain it was simply because I was a successful captain and whenever I wanted certain player I convinced selectors to get that player and not through dictatorship," said Inzamam.

In March, Pakistan lost their opening match to the hosts West Indies and were then knocked out by minnows Ireland.

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