

Another PEC meeting held

SPORTS REPORTER

It was yet another routine work when the performance evaluation committee (PEC) of Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) talked with the national team management to get the post-mortem report of the just concluded series against India.

The committee headed by BCB vice-president Shah Nurul Kabir Shaheen met with outgoing coach Day Whatmore, chief selector Faruque Ahmed, captain Habibul Bashar and vice-captain Mohammad Ashraful separately to get their explanations behind poor showings in the series, especially in the Tests.

"It was just a routine meeting. The board is not at all dissatisfied with the one-day performance but the Test performance was a real concern for us. What everybody said that the thirteen months' break was one of the main reasons behind the poor showing in Test series. All have suggested to give emphasis on the four-day competition at domestic level," informed Shaheen.

The most controversial issue during the series was the decision of fielding first by the Bangladesh team management in the second Test, which simply backfired.

"They admitted that their plan didn't work," said a satisfied

SEE PAGE 18 COL 3

Bridge meet from Friday

SPORTS REPORTER

Worldwide Bridge Pairs competition will begin at the Bangladesh Bank Club on Friday. The tournament will start at 3pm and the entry fee for each pair is Tk. 200.

The competition is organised by Bangladesh Bridge Federation.



Did U Know?

The French Open is 110 years old. It first took place in 1891 in the form of a national championship and became international in 1925.



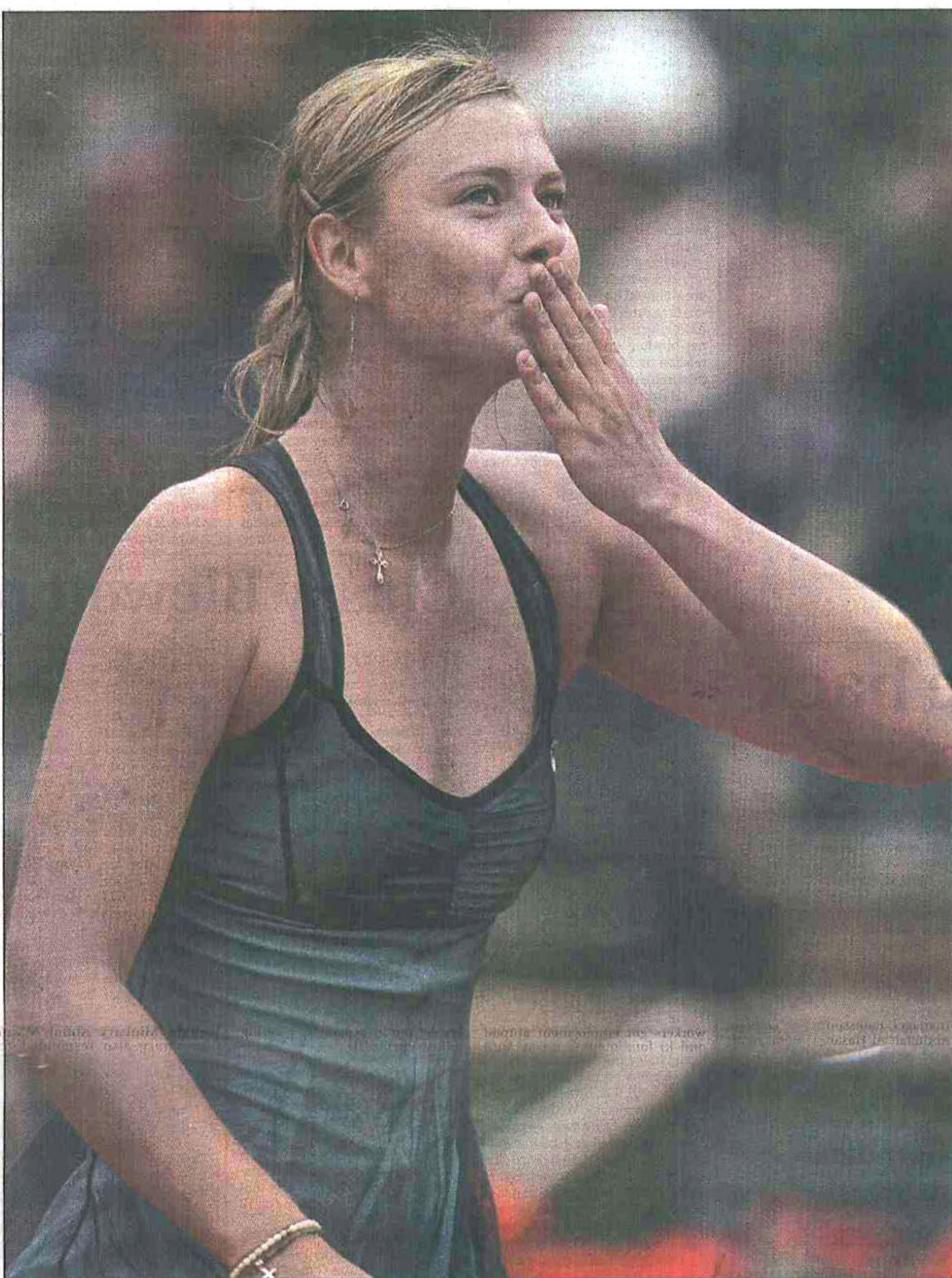
ESPN
Sportscentre India
Live from 8:30 pm
STAR Sports
French Open
Second Round
Live from 3:00 pm



Michael Vaughan
(England cricket captain)
"He'll be a real threat to all batsmen if he can reproduce that kind of performance on a regular basis."
On Ryan Sidebottom who took eight wickets in this week's second Test against West Indies.



DAY'S EVENT
B.League
Muktijoddha V Cg Mohammedan (4:30 pm)
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium



Russian superstar Maria Sharapova blows a kiss to the crowd after her victory over Frenchwoman Emilie Loit during their first round match of French Open at the Roland Garros in Paris on Wednesday.

Sharapova conquers pain

AFP, Paris



Second seed Maria Sharapova of Russia showed no signs of the shoulder injury that has dogged her for most of this year as she made a winning start to her French Open campaign on Wednesday.

She beat France's Emilie Loit 6-3, 7-6 (7/4) in 1 hour 50 minutes and will play veteran American Jill Craybas for a place in the third round.

There were straight set wins also for Sharapova's third seeded compatriot and last year's beaten finalist Svetlana Kuznetsova who cruised past another Russian Ekaterina Bychkova 6-0, 6-3 and for rising Serbian youngster and sev-

enth seed Ana Ivanovic who blasted past Sweden's Sofia Arvidsson 6-2, 6-0.

Another Russian, ninth seed Anna Chakvetadze, joined them in the second round with a comprehensive 6-2, 6-3 win over Alicia Molik of Australia.

But there was dismay for the 2004 champion Anastasia Myskina, whose recent downward spiral continued with a 6-1, 6-0 hammering at the hands of veteran American Meghann Shaughnessy.

Playing in her first Grand Slam event since turning 20, Sharapova is badly short of match practice having only returned to action in Istanbul last week after two months out to treat the tendonitis pain in her shoulder.

And in Turkey she was gunned down 6-2, 6-4 by French youngster Aravane Rezaï at the semifinal stage.

On top of that the French Open is the Grand Slam tournament that gives the big-hitting Russian the most problems and she has yet to get past the quarterfinals in four attempts.

But after breaking the veteran Loit in the third game she was given a much-needed confidence boost as the French player needed to take a medical time-out to get treatment for a thigh muscle injury.

On the resumption, Sharapova broke again to move 4-1 up and though dropping her own service two games later she still comfortably took the set 6-3.

Clad in three-quarter-length black leggings to combat the cold, damp conditions, Sharapova was finding that her big-hitting abilities were neutralised by the slow claycourt.

She dropped her serve in the

SEE PAGE 18 COL 2

Season over for Aminul

SPORTS REPORTER

National football captain Aminul Haque will miss the entire season after the number one goalkeeper of the country was ruled out for the rest of the inaugural professional football league.

The Muktijoddha player sat out the first leg of the B. League due to a knee injury that aggravated during training.

"As I feel that most of the league would be finished before I get fully fit, I chose not to play and give my team the chance to register an extra goalie," Aminul told last night.

"I was cured after the surgery in Mumbai but I feel that I stressed too much during the pre-season training in a bid to speed up my recovery and aggravated the injury."

"Now I am preparing myself for the next season," said Aminul, who also suffered long injuries in the past but always returned with sharpened skill that makes him the most wanted shot-stopper in the country.

Muktijoddha registered young Nur Alam as their second reserve keeper after now first-choice Titumir, who has been standing under the bar since the start of the season, and Himel.

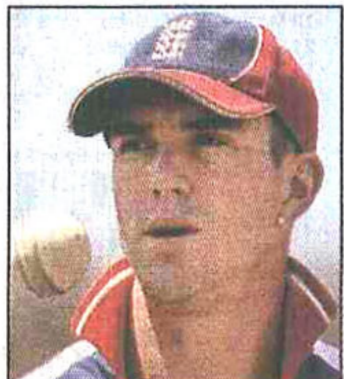
Ghaem joins 5 others on top

SPORTS REPORTER

Iranian Grand Master Ghaem Maghami Ehsan joined previous round's five leaders atop the table of the 8th United Insurance and United Leasing Grandmasters Chess tournament yesterday.

In the fourth round, Ghaem beat India's GN Gopal to extend his collection to three points. The others to have three points are FM Nasir Ahmed, IM Abdullah Al Rakib, GM Reefat Bin Sattar, IM Enamul Hossain Rajib and Vietnamese GM Nguyen Anh Dung.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5



KEVIN PIETERSEN

'Wish he was Aussie'

Cricket

AFP, London

Justin Langer has said Australia "would love" to have England's Kevin Pieteresen in their side.

The South Africa-born batsman enhanced his growing reputation with 226, his maiden Test double hundred, in England's crushing innings victory against the West Indies at Headingley.

Only Australia's Sir Donald Bradman, who scored more runs in his first 25 Tests than the 26-year-old Pieteresen's 2,448.

Former Australia opening batsman Langer was on the opposite side when Pieteresen scored the first of his eight Test hundreds -- 158 at The Oval -- to wrap up a draw that

secured England's 2005 Ashes series win.

And Langer, who retired from Test cricket after Australia's 5-0 Ashes series win earlier this year, was on hand to see Pieteresen again

score 158 in the Adelaide Test of that campaign.

"From an Australian's point of view the greatest compliment we can give an opposition player is that we don't really like him much," Langer, now captain of English county Somerset, wrote in his BBC column.

"And the reason we don't really like Kevin Pieteresen is that he displays traits which rub us up the wrong way. He struts a little, he is aggressive in everything he does, he takes on any bowler and he stares you in the eyes with the confidence of a prizefighter."

"We would love to have him in our team, because we love the way he goes about his business. He is an outstanding player in that he backs his ability to the hilt and he makes the game go forward every time he is in the middle."

More to what meets the eye

Cricket

SHAKIL KASEM

The recently concluded and eminently forgettable Test series has thrown up more questions for Bangladesh cricket than answers of any kind.

The first question, even after seven years of Test cricket is whether we have what it takes to come to terms with life as it is in the rarified atmosphere of this level of the game. For sure, we know how and why we achieved test status, much to the chagrin of the exclusive club of big boys playing the game. The ICC in the year 2000 had a different look to it, and some might even insist uncharitably, vested interest in adding one more Asian name to its meagre roster of Test playing nations. More than a hundred years of Test cricket and only nine nations of the world playing the game? Admittedly, it wasn't quite cricket. But having had the silver spoon thrust down its throat has Bangladesh really tried to fit the bill? Alas, to paraphrase Henry Miller, so hurtles this spear of query demanding to be caught on the shield of the mind. The answer is not blowing in the wind, indeed the answer is more questions of the unpalatable kind.

Forty-six odd Tests have thrown up a princely total of victories one could count on the fingers of an amputated hand. True, there had been the odd glimmer of something extraordinary lurking around the corner, but those were nipped in the bud by the odd and errant umpiring decision (read the Pakistan series) or a fatal dropped catch (read the series against Australia). But these are the usual traffic on the road and certainly not the first or the last time that Bangladesh might come across such

slips between the cup and the lip.

No, there is more to it than meets the eye. It was Henri Toulouse-Lautrec, not one with any cricketing pretensions mind you, who once said, "If we could only look instead of gawking, we would see horror in the heart of farce." We really need to look inwards towards where we stand rather than where we are intending to go. Motivations, as Kissinger was wont to repeat more often than not, must stem from self assessments.

Cricket, Test cricket more so, is a complete package. It comprises money, infrastructure, planning, coaching, wickets, an intense level of domestic cricket and lastly, a team of skilled, talented and committed individuals who can actually play the game on its merits. It would need a really brave soul in Bangladesh to claim that we have all of these bases covered.

At the moment money we should be having in plenty, with more in the pipeline over the next few years. I am certain it is being spent and will certainly continue to be so, in good faith. The question is, are the proper infrastructures being readied? We are already behind the clock on this front, compared to the rest of the countries we are expected to do battle with. Grounds and facilities are at a premium and coupled with the lack of planning cricket at the formative years of a budding cricketer is hardly allowing the growth of such individuals to take the game they love to the next level.

Sub standard wickets at almost every level of the game is extracting a heavy price on the abilities of both batsmen and bowlers. Of course there are constraints, but which test playing opposition is going to take such constraints into consideration? The most recent two and half-day Test is a case in point.

We do seem to have an organised coaching system in place, but to have a pool of players conditioned to the dictates of Test match cricket requires such a system to perform over and beyond the call of duty. We can only wait and watch the grass grow and the coaches to deliver.

The cornerstone of any Test playing country worth its salt, is its domestic cricket. Do we have such a cricket phenomenon as a domestic competition? Erratic schedules, indifferent playing conditions, recalcitrant teams and poor bowling attacks seem to be the order of the day for our domestic format of the longer version of the game. How else to explain what just happened earlier in the week? A team that lost twenty wickets in less than a day of Test cricket cannot just be held accountable by itself only. The fact that Bangladesh did not play any Tests for thirteen months should not also be a reason or excuse. Aminul Islam Bulbul batted for nine hours in our inaugural Test. Bangladesh had not played a Test for thirty years until then.

We are underperforming, and this is not coming from a rocket scientist. Nor do we need such a scientist to tell us how to set things right. The problem is time, which has this uncanny habit of running out when we most need it. It is somewhat of a paradox really. Test cricket is a kind of marathon. To be good at it we would need to sprint to catch up with its demands. It would be tempting to blame everything on the players and the captain for our recent and customary debacle. But that would be taking the easy option. As Confucius said, when the finger points at the moon, the fool looks at the finger. There really is more to what meets the eye.

(The author is a former national cricketer)

Testing time for booters

2nd leg starts today



SPORTS REPORTER

The tackles of opposition players apart, the footballers will have to face another adversity when the second leg of the B. League begins today during one of the hottest summers in recent times.

Extreme heat and humidity will put the booters to the test as the title race for the inaugural professional football league gets intense from 12th week of the competition.

With just three points separating the top five, it would be anybody's game in the tightest chase ever seen in domestic football and leaders Mohammedan's one-point lead would hardly give any comfort to Shaheequl Islam Manik.

Six wins in a row not only buried a wretched start for Mohammedan but also put Manik's boys above big-budgeted sides like Abahani, Sheikh Russel and Muktijoddha who are still breathing on the black and whites' neck.

Chittagong Mohammedan's lovely brand of football, however, made them the most impressive side as well as a contender. The port city team, ably guided by Nazrul Islam Ledu, have already proved their worth by not losing to big

names at home and topping defending two-time Dhaka Premier League champions Brothers in the table.

Brothers are sixth but not far by means of points and still can fight back under wily Indian coach Syed Nayeemuddin, especially after showing signs of improvement in the latter part of the first leg.

The key would be getting the side stronger and Brothers will get back midfielder Liton, whose ban was lifted by the federation during the two-week mid-season transfer period, which ended last night.

The Oranges are also trying to bring back Ghanaian forward Enock Bentil, who left in the middle of the campaign due to injury. Manager Amer Khan informed that Enock is expected to join the side before their second match on June 10.

Muktijoddha, who host Chittagong Mohammedan at the Bangabandhu National Stadium

POINTS TABLE							
Teams	M	W	D	L	GFGA	Pts	
Mohammedhan	10	6	2	2	22	7	20
Russel	10	5	4	1	12	4	19
Abahani	10	5	4	1	10	3	19
Muktijoddha	10	5	3	2	16	7	18
Ctg Mohammedan	10	5	2	3	8	6	17
Brothers	10	4	3	3	15	10	15
Arambagh	10	4	1	5	9	10	13
Khulna Abahani	10	3	1	6	11	10	10
Farashganj	10	2	4	4	8	12	10
Ctg Abahani	10	3	0	7	7	19	9
Rahmatganj	10	0	2	8	5	26	2

today with revenge on mind following their first leg defeat in Chittagong, confirmed that national number one custodian Aminul will not be available for the rest of the season.

They included a junior goalkeeper, Nur Alam, as cover and Cameroon-born Kum, who leaves in Dhaka with his father and has been training with the Reds for a long time. They have also loaned midfielder Jonny from Chittagong Abahani.

Russel, who faced Mohammedan in the big match this week, have replaced Mohamed Khoubache with two more of his Moroccan compatriots, Nuruddin Zaim and Rida Saadane, for the rest of the league. The second-placed side will not have the services of Amin Rana, who has been suffering from jaundice and hence excluded from the squad.

Abahani, in a vulnerable position last night, finally confirmed five foreign imports in their roster including Khoubache just before the deadline.

The sky-blues, who released two Argentines, gave up waiting on their old players Ndem and Marshall and Jeremiah, who played for Muktijoddha two seasons back on Cameroon and Ghana. The trio reportedly completed all preparations to arrive in Dhaka but failed to show up in time.

Abahani's two new signings are

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1



Nasir Ahmed (L) and IM Abdullah Al Rakib ponder their next move in the United Leasing and United Insurance 8th Grandmasters Chess tournament at the NSC conference room yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR