



Did U Know?

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza has a strike-rate of 96.35, the highest for any Bangladeshi in one-day internationals.



Bishan Bedi
(Great Indian left-arm spinner)
"Murali will complete 1000 Test wickets but they would count as mere run-outs in my eyes."
When asked about Sri Lanka great Muttiah Muralidaran.

What to WATCH

ESPN
English Premier League
Sunderland v Tottenham
Live at 5.40pm
West Ham v Manchester City
Live at 7.55pm

STAR Sports
English Premier League
Bolton v Newcastle
Live at 7.55pm
Aston Villa v Liverpool
Live at 10.10pm

Active chess title Javed's

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammed Javed clinched the weekend Active Chess title held at the Bangladesh Chess Federation hall-room yesterday.

Javed finished with five points in the daylong event, edging Mahtabuddin Robin, Minhajuddin Sagar, Aminul Islam Palash and Hasan Imam, who also collected five points but fell behind in progressive score.

A total of 38 players took part in the competition.

Dinesh doesn't feel bad

PTI, London

On a day when a horrendous leg before decision given against Sourav Ganguly was a topic of debate, Dinesh Karthick did well to clear all doubts regarding his own caught behind dismissal that saw him missing a deserving hundred by just nine runs.

Karthick made a sparkling 91 before being out and many believed that he too was a victim of a dubious decision by umpire Ian Howell on the first day of the third and final Test at the Oval.

"I was definitely disappointed the way I got out. There was a small nick, no doubt about that," said Karthick who was dismissed caught at the wicket off Ryan Sidebottom.

Just later in the day, Ganguly received a rank bad decision when he was ruled out leg before despite getting a thick inside edge. That is why Karthick's disclosure comes as

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5

Footballers, cine stars to raise fund

SPORTS REPORTER

The clubs of Dhaka will organise a charity football match on Friday to raise fund for the flood victims.

Top footballers of the country and stars of the silver screen will take part in the exhibition match to be played at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Tigers in Sylhet

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Mohammad Ashraf's men reached Sylhet yesterday to go through a special conditioning camp, popularly known as 'boot camp', under a unit of Bangladesh Army to warm-up for the Twenty20 World Championship in South Africa.

This kind of special training is nothing new to international cricket but first time for the current crop of Tigers who will have the six-day camp under the 'Special Warfare Wing' from today.

Local coach Sarwar Imran and physio Azmal Hossain Mithu will accompany the team but they do not have any job other than just looking after fitness issues as an Army unit will be in charge of the players during the strenuous routine in hot and humid conditions.

"Actually we are all excited to get this new experience. What we have learnt is that this training is for gaining fitness and getting stronger as quickly as possible. We will be briefed about the programme this evening," said captain Ashraf, who along with his colleagues appeared at the Bangabandhu National Stadium

yesterday morning before boarding the bus for Sylhet.

"We are desperately looking forward to get back our team spirit after the disastrous Sri Lanka tour. I hope that the training would be helpful for us," he added.

However, the young brigade is more excited with the special training camp.

"I'm simply thrilled. It is really exciting. I got the first national call and I am also going to be a part of this new experience," said dashing left-handed opener Junaed Siddique, who impressed the national selectors with his hard-hitting ability in the domestic competitions.

"We are simply excited," responded Tamim Iqbal.

The national selectors announced a 15-member squad for the competition but vice-captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza is unlikely to get the experience of the camp because of family commitment while Aftab Ahmed will join the camp on August 15 after completing his wedding reception.

"Mashrafe is expected to return home on August 14 from abroad but I am not sure whether he will join the camp in Sylhet because we have to consider his fitness first. He has claimed to be fit but we have to be

more careful about Mashrafe before allowing him to go through such a strenuous programme," said Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu, chairman of the cricket operations committee.

"Actually everything is not clear to me. I will go to Sylhet tomorrow to know about the training," said the former national skipper.

Interim national coach Shaun Williams is expected to return on August 14 but Lipu was not sure whether he would join the team in Sylhet.

"I am not sure whether Shaun needs to join the camp because the players would be the babies of the battalion there. Our fitness trainer Paul Chapman was expected to join today but he had to overstay in Bangkok for his wife's illness," Lipu informed.

The national cricketers will return to Dhaka on August 16 and will get two days break before beginning cricket practice.

They are expected to fly to Nairobi on August 29 for a triangular tournament involving Pakistan and Kenya before going to South Africa.



New boys Junaed Siddique (L) and Ziaur Rahman (C) on the Sylhet-bound bus along with captain Mohammad Ashraf (background) yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Dhoni blasts England

Cricket

AFP, London

Mahendra Dhoni's rapid 92 powered India past the 500-mark as they strengthened their grip on the third and final Test against England at The Oval here Friday.

At tea, on the second day, India, were 559 for seven, after Sachin Tendulkar had made 82 in ideal, sunny, batting conditions on a placid pitch.

India's total was the highest in Test history without an individual century, surpassing the 524 for nine declared they made against New Zealand at Kanpur in November 1976.

Anil Kumble, the sixth batsman in the innings to score fifty, was 60 not out and Zaheer Khan seven not out. India, 1-0 up, had merely to avoid defeat in this match to win only their third series in England in 15 campaigns dating back to 1932.

England, by contrast, had to win

to maintain their six-year unbeaten run in home Test series.

No India batsman has made a century in this series so far but Dhoni did not appear to have any concern for personal glory during an 81-ball innings featuring four sixes and nine fours.

The wicketkeeper, 33 not out at lunch, cut loose after his fifty when lofting left-arm spinner Monty Panesar for two straight sixes in three balls.

Panesar, at tea, had bowled 34 wicketless overs for 123 runs.

Ryan Sidebottom didn't bowl after lunch because of what was believed to be a side strain.

England captain Michael Vaughan brought on Kevin Pietersen, presumably in a bid to tempt Dhoni into rashness.

The part-time off-spinner, who before this match had a Test bowling average of 221 with one wicket -- Pakistan's Kamran Akmal at Lord's last year -- saw his third delivery driven high over long-on for six.

Next ball wicketkeeper Dhoni

swept over the head of Panesar at deep square leg for another six.

But Dhoni, going for a third six in a row, hold out to deep mid-wicket where Alastair Cook, running in from the boundary, took a well-judged low catch.

But any thoughts England had of running through the tail were dispelled by Kumble's 109-ball fifty featuring nine fours.

Tendulkar, who made 91 in India's seven-wicket second Test win in Nottingham, was nearing three figures when he guided a James Anderson delivery to first slip Andrew Strauss.

The 'Little Master', in what could be his last Test in England, faced 192 balls with 11 fours in an innings lasting nearly five hours.

India resumed Friday on 316 for four with Tendulkar, dropped on 20

SEE PAGE 18 COL 6

Nayeem to name nat'l squads tomorrow

SPORTS REPORTER

Syed Nayeemuddin will take another day to settle his mind before naming two different national teams for this month's Merdeka Cup and Nehru Cup international tournaments.

Bangladesh will send teams of equal strength to the tournaments in Malaysia and India and Nayeemuddin, the former Indian international and coach, who officially took charge as national coach this month, will announce the squads tomorrow instead of today.

"The weather really hampered our training. The ground was waterlogged yesterday so we could not train properly," told Nayeem from the residential camp at BKSP over phone.

"It is also risky. So I want to see them one more day in the field," said Nayeem.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1

SLC's tough stance

Cricket

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lankan cricket's governing body on Friday threatened to ban any national player who took part in the breakaway multi-million dollar Indian Cricket League.

Sri Lankan players participating in any 'tournament or league other than Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC)-approved events shall not be eligible for selection to represent Sri Lanka," an SLC statement said.

SLC secretary Kangadara Mathivanan added that players who played in the Indian Cricket League (ICL) would also not be associated with any official cricket activity in the island nation.

"They will not be considered for selection to play even domestic cricket, hold any position in the cricket administration or even officiate as umpires or commentators," Mathivanan told AFP.

Current players Marvan Atapattu

and Sanath Jayasuriya and the recently retired Russel Arnold have been linked with the ICL.

But Arnold, who has just begun a career as a television commentator, was the only player to publicly acknowledge his desire to take part.

"So far no current player has approached us with their intention to take part in the ICL," Mathivanan said.

He also ruled out anyone wanting to do so after the SLC's latest decision.

Atapattu, a former captain and veteran of 88 Tests, was released by the SLC from his central contract last week. The move was widely seen as an expression of his intention to play in the ICL.

The Sri Lankan cricket administration in 1982 slapped a 25-year ban on 14 cricketers, led by then Test captain Bandula Warnapura, for playing in South Africa. They defied a government ban against any sporting contact with the then apartheid regime.

The ban was lifted in 1990 and

some rebel players are currently involved in the game's administration.

The SLC's latest decision follows a similar move by the Indian cricket board to bar rebel players from official cricket.

The ICL, which is bankrolled by India's largest listed media house, Zee Telefilms, plans to hold Twenty20 matches between six city teams in October and November.

Each squad is supposed to comprise four international players, two Indian stars and eight upcoming cricketers, according to an ICL announcement in May.

The Indian board's tough stance has already made it difficult for the rival series to recruit current cricketers from both within and outside the country.

Retired West Indian captain

SEE PAGE 18 COL 5

Mission: Crack Big Four

QUAZI ZULQUARNIAN ISLAM



Say what you will but as far as marketing is concerned there is no league in the world that comes close to matching the popularity of the English Premiership. Which is why more than a million fans will be tuning into their TV channels (a lesser number visiting the fields with what exorbitant ticket prices) when the Premier League returns for its 16th instalment at the Stadium of Light on Saturday.

The pre-noun kick-off will see the recently promoted Sunderland, led by the legendary Roy Keane host one of the pretenders to the English "Big Four" (more on that) Tottenham Hotspur.

But first, why watch the Premier League?

Well for one, the action is fast flowing and end-to-end. The tackles are full-blooded, the interplay swift and thereby the entertainment unparalleled. The players are the most famous in the world and the managers are no less daunting.

Virtually speaking, this is as big as it gets.

On the ground though, some problems are worryingly obvious and none more so than the monop-

oly of the aforementioned "Big Four".

Watchers of the Premier League will be well aware of this term (and chose to smooth over it) but before the other group conjures up some Orwellian imagery of totalitarian rule (not far from the truth) an explanation is due.

The Premiership Big Four consist of Manchester United, Chelsea, Liverpool and Arsenal. And what is worrying about these four teams is that apart from being quite a match for any other side in the world, they prove to be a step beyond any of the other sixteen sides in the English top division over the course of the season.

It would even have been slightly reassuring to say that the EPL has been an oligopoly but a duopoly would be more close to the truth. Liverpool despite their increasing investment have failed to click week in week out and need we say anymore about the departure of the Gallic fixture in the Arsenal side. So Manchester United and Chelsea it has been and a two-horse race is as good a bet as any for the league title come May.

United have been far the busier of the two teams, investing wisely (if exorbitantly) to procure the services of Owen Hargreaves and Carlos Tevez. One will plug the midfield

while the other will offer more mobility in attack a trend Sir Alex Ferguson prefers these days. Two more significant investments have been made, both to secure prodigious talents. Nani the left-winger from Portugal and Anderson, a Brazilian import from the same country. It may yet be early for the two but don't count them out to make an impact. United are evens to retain the crown they won last season especially if Cristiano Ronaldo and Wayne Rooney can forge the partnership of last season. C'Ron in particular will be looking to establish himself as one of the leading players in the world.

Chelsea have been surprisingly prudent snapping up three players on free transfers and only trumping some 14 million Euros for French left-winger Florent Malouda. The 2006 World Cup runner-up will allow Jose Mourinho to play a more expansive winger accommodated style this season. His high work rate, and overall intelligence will be an asset to a Chelsea side who will have at least two players with a lot to prove.

Michael Ballack and Andriy Shevchenko have hardly set pulses racing in their first season and although both are nursing injuries, they will be eager to make their mark. This added incentive will

hopefully for Mourinho compensate the loss of last season hero Didier Drogba, Michael Essien and John Obi Mikel to the African Cup of Nations in January.

Liverpool finally look genuine title contenders but their have been too many false dawns to interest the Kop faithful. They have invested big to bring in Spanish starlet Fernando Torres and with the former Atletico Madrid man keen to make a name for himself, Liverpool may yet benefit from his ambition. Rafa Benitez's managerial acumen is second to none and he is quite the right man to mould his generous squad into champion material.

Finally, Arsenal. Gone is Thierry Henry and while many may believe this to be the beginning of the end for the Gunners, Arsene Wenger hardly sees it that way. Cesc Fabregas and William Gallas have been given bigger roles in the team and this could be the season Robin van Persie emerges from the shadows. The Gunners haven't quite run out of bullets yet.

But the biggest question is

SEE PAGE 18 COL 6



PHOTO: AFP

India wicketkeeper-batsman Mahendra Dhoni whacks the ball through point for a boundary off England spinner Monty Panesar (not in picture) during the second day's play in the third and final Test at the Oval on Friday.

Yousuf set to sign

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Mohammad Yousuf is expected to sign his central contract with the Pakistan Cricket Board over the next few days, though uncertainty remains over the future of Abdul Razzaq, the other player yet to sign the contract.

The two were surprisingly omitted from Pakistan's Twenty20 World Championship squad and coupled with the delays in signing their contracts have stirred speculation about the future of both players.

It had been suggested that the two were refusing to sign up as protest at their exclusion and even that both may take up lucrative

offers from the Indian Cricket League (ICL) instead. Yousuf, however, clarified to Cricinfo that the delay on his part had only been because he received the contract late.

"I only saw the contract yesterday (Thursday). My lawyer is going through it now and I see no problem in signing it once the lawyer has seen it, which should take a day or two," Yousuf said.

The PCB had set a deadline for August 10 as the last day for all players to sign their contracts but an official said that the deadline would be extended for Yousuf. "He had been away for the last few days and there was no communication but now he has informed us that his lawyer is going over the contract. There should not be a problem in

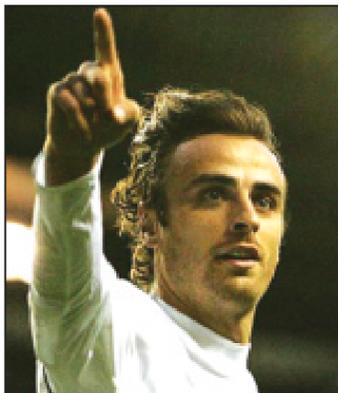
giving him a couple of extra days to go over it and inform us of his decision," the official told Cricinfo.

The situation for Razzaq is not so straightforward. Despite repeated attempts, the board has not been able to contact him to get an answer. Additionally, Razzaq's comments on a TV show recently, where he attacked the board and the selectors for his exclusion, have strained relations.

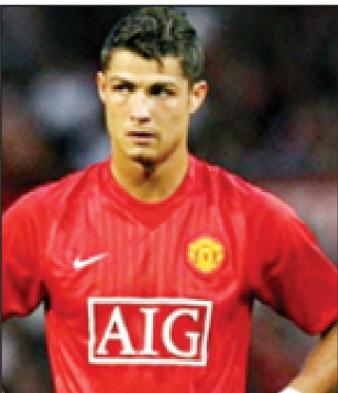
"We have heard nothing from Razzaq at all. Friday is officially the last day for signing up but in cases, as with Yousuf, we can extend it. But that is only if there is some communication," said the official.

When asked what that meant for Razzaq's future, the official said,

SEE PAGE 18 COL 8



BERBATOV



C. RONALDO



MALOUA