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Mohammedan-Abahani 'final' today

SPORTS REPORTER

Warm-up over, Abahani and Mohammedan gear up for the third and final match of the Teletalk Series hoping that the decider will put an end to the scarcity of crowd.

With the charity series -- organised by the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) to raise fund for the victims of Cyclone Sidr that ripped through the southern part of the country last month -- locked 1-1, today's match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium will separate the winners.

The match will kick off at 4.30pm.

The two perennial foes' failure to attract fans in the last two matches was not totally unexpected as people have already turned their faces from the game. Even during competitive matches between the city rivals, the stadium remained half-full.

A total of 14,000 tickets worth just over Tk four lakh have been sold so far but the organisers are still hoping for a boost by the holiday crowd.

Mohammedan won the first encounter 5-4 on penalties after a goalless draw in regulation 90 minutes but Abahani bounced back with a 2-1 victory in the second match to level the scores.

Abahani captain Arif Khan Joy and Mohammedan's guest defender Hassan Al Mamun, who were sent off during the incident-packed first game, will return after serving one-match bans.

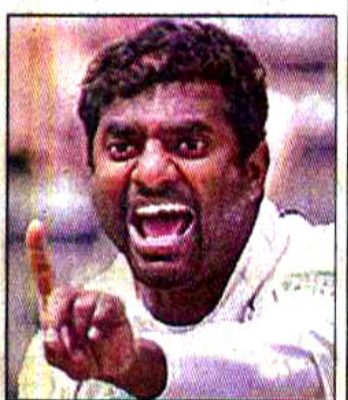
On the other hand, black and whites coach Shaiful Islam Manik who inspired his boys to walk off the ground in protest of a disallowed goal, has been suspended.

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Did U Know?

The main court at the Wimbledon is called Centre Court, while Court 1 hosts other important matches. Court 2 bears the nickname 'The Graveyard', since it is here that many seeded players are knocked out.



Muttiah Muralidaran

(Sri Lanka's world record-breaking spinner)

"I tried to spin the ball one way and it went the other way. But it's a special wicket."

While admitting his record-breaking dismissal of Paul Collingwood didn't quite go to plan.



STAR Sports
Zimbabwe v West Indies
Fourth One-Day International
Live at 1:30pm



National Cricket League
(Round Seven, Day Three)
Dhaka v Sylhet
Venue: Fatullah Cricket Stadium
Chittagong v Khulna
Venue: Chittagong Divisional Stadium
Barisal v Rajshahi
Venue: Shaheed Chandu Stadium



Khulna opener Nazmus Sadat pulls one during his sparkling 91 against Chittagong on the second day of the National Cricket League match at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Mullick recognised

National Sports Awards announced

SPORTS REPORTER

Late Ataul Huq Mullick -- a journalist who lived in cricket -- was reportedly removed from the National Sports Awards list last year as a vice-president of the previous executive committee of the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) manipulated the selection.

The BCB official, an MP of the BNP went on to receive an award at the cost of everyone's favourite Atahai, who has finally been honoured by the government.

Sports Adviser Tapan Chowdhury yesterday announced eight sportsmen and two organisers including Ataul Huq Mullick as the recipients of the National Sports Awards for 2007.

The others winners are Sharmila Roy (athletics), Ranajit Das (football), Amir Hossain Patwary (kabaddi), Lt Com (ret'd) M Arshad (swimming), Aminul Islam (judo), Nurul Islam (hockey), Sheikh Abul Hashem (badminton), Prof. Dr Rashid Uddin Ahmed (basketball) and Kazi Anisur Rahman (organiser).

It was sight for sore eyes to see so many veterans in the list. It was also the first time that the awards have been announced in front of the media.

"We tried to reward the veter-

ans, who really deserved it but have been ignored for long," said Tapan Chowdhury who announced the awards at the conference room of the Youth and Sports Ministry.

The sports adviser added that he wants to change the tradition of giving the awards on the basis of applications.

"We will not take any applications from the next year. We have seen that there are many protests against applicants. So we are trying to change the policy officially," said Tapan.

It was learned that a 19-year-old footballer, star of a school tournament, applied for this year's national award.

This incident irked most members of the 23-man selection committee who forwarded the final selection to the ministry.

Ataul Huq Mullick was not just a journalist but the statistician who provided the young generation invaluable information about any sports and their laws. He played cricket for three decades and was a first class cricket umpire before becoming a scorer.

Ataul, a noted commentator and organiser, later shaped both the umpires' and scorers' organisations.

Meanwhile, the youngest winner for 2007 is 45-year-old judoka

Aminul Islam, who won gold in South Asian competition and the 8th Japan Cup international meet.

Sharmila Roy, 48, won 45 medals including gold at the National Athletics Championships from 1979-1990 and also participated in SAF Games and Asian and World Athletics Championships, bagging silver and bronze.

Ranajit Das, a veteran of 74, was East Pakistan state football team goalkeeper from 1955-66 and stood under the bar for the East Pakistan hockey team from 1965-69.

The other 70-plus winners are swimmer M Arshad, a gold medalist at RCD swimming in Tehran in 1964, and Kazi Anisur Rahman, who served different federations and clubs and was member of the Bangladesh Olympic Association from 1994-99.

Rashid Uddin Ahmed, one of the top neurosurgeons of the country, was the first captain of the East Pakistan basketball team and a founder member of the inaugural basketball league in Bangladesh.

Nurul Islam was a national hockey player from 1978-86. Abul Hashem won three national singles badminton titles and Amir Hossain, the best kabaddi player in 1977, played for the national team for ten years.

BD-Pak U-19s' series decider today

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Under-19s will look forward to bank on their remarkable comeback in one-day series when they take on Pakistan U-19s in the fifth and final match today in Karachi.

The match will be held at the National Bank of Pakistan ground in the Pakistani port city.

Bangladesh were 2-0 down after losing the first two games in Hyderabad but Karachi turned out to be a happy hunting ground for the visitors who levelled 2-2 with victories by 24 and 13 runs.

NZ club invites Al Shahriar

SPORTS REPORTER

Experienced batsman Al Shahriar received an invitation to play for Havelock North Cricket Club, a premier division side in New Zealand's north island.

A fax from the club reached Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), asking for permission to approach the gifted right-handed batsman, who is captaining Dhaka in the ongoing National Cricket League. But the fax did not mention any accommodation or financial details. However, the invitation is for the ongoing domestic season in the town.

When contacted, Shahriar said that it is an initial offer and it is up to the cricket board to decide.

Sangakkara top batsman

AFP, Colombo

Prolific Sri Lankan Kumar Sangakkara took over as the number one Test batsman after his record-breaking feats in the first Test against England, according to official new rankings released Thursday.

Sangakkara's teammate Muttiah Muralidaran, who this week overtook retired Australian Shane Warne as the leading wicket-taker, already tops the Test rankings for bowlers, according to the International Cricket Council rankings.

Left-handed Sangakkara, 30, continued his brilliant recent form by making 92 and a match-winning 152 to help Sri Lanka defeat England by 88 runs in the Kandy Test on Wednesday.

His second-innings century made him the first batsman in history to score 150-plus in four consecutive Tests, having scored 200 not out and 222 not out against Bangladesh at home in July and 192 against Australia in Hobart last month.

Australian legend Don Bradman, Wally Hammond of England and Mudassar Nazar of Pakistan did it in three successive Tests.

Sangakkara, with 938 points, overtook Australian captain Ricky Ponting, who is now in second place with 936 points. Muralidaran ended the first Test with 713 wickets from 116 matches. The second Test against England starts here on Sunday.

Dhaka struggling

SPORTS REPORTER



Sylhet had a handsome lead over Dhaka while Chittagong kept their upper hand over Khulna and Barisal took a slender lead over Rajshahi on the second day of the 9th National Cricket League across the country yesterday.

Dhaka were struggling at 148-5 in Fatullah with left-arm spinner Nabil Samad playing the key role with the ball after Sylhet had reached 312 in their first innings.

At the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogra, Rajshahi were first bowled out for 204 and then took two late Barisal wickets as the home side ended the day at 48-2.

Away in Chittagong, the hosts led by captain Ehsanul Haq's 78 dominated proceedings as they amassed 359 in their first innings and then had visitors Khulna, 216-6, in trouble.

CHITTAGONG-KHULNA

In reply to Chittagong's 359, Khulna opener Nazmus Sadat got them off to a flier. He dominated his opening stand of 65 runs with

Imrul Kayes, who made 16. He missed a certain century, as he was third batsman out at 142 in the 47th over. Sadat made 91 in just about two hours, cracking thirteen boundaries.

Captain Habibur Bashar, back from a shoulder injury, went to 35 but fell when it was time to stay for his side. That created a little flutter as new boy Sanjay Chakrobarty fell for a duck and Salim was last man out for 7.

Off-spinner Yasin Arafat took three wickets while Kamrul Islam and Mohammad Younus took one each.

Earlier, Ehsanul ensured full batting points for his side as he took Chittagong past the 350-mark. Left-arm spinner Murad Khan dismissed him for 78, made with the help of twelve boundaries.

BARISAL-RAJSHAHI

Resuming the day on 39-1, Rajshahi struggled to cope with the pace and spin combination thrown up by Barisal.

Impressive left-arm bowler Sajidul Islam again had a brilliant day, taking three for 40 in 21 overs. He took the key wickets of Farhad Hossain and Anisur Rahman,

centurions of the sixth round, and then trapped experienced all-rounder Mushfiqur Rahman as Rajshahi slipped to 130-6.

Naeem Islam, with 68 in more than three hours, added 65 for the seventh wicket with Mahbub Alam, who made 27.

Barisal were off to a rocky start, losing opener Hannan Sarkar in the 13th over and then further going into the mire with skipper Shahriar Nafees going off due to headache. Imran Ahmed fell for 6 in the end as Barisal were perilously placed at 48-2.

DHAKA-SYLHET

In form Golam Mabud helped add 89 runs to first day's 223-7 as Sylhet somehow took charge of the match from the onset.

Mabud's unbeaten 75 had ten boundaries in his 206 balls as they reached 312 all out in 116 overs. Paceman Mohammad Sharif ended with figures of 4-60 while Mahbub Alam and Mohammad Rafique took two each.

Golam Rahman and Rashidur Rahman trapped Dhaka early on as they fell to 10 for two and then Nabil cashed in to take three more.

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It's for Tushar's taking



MOHAMMAD ISAM

With the day's practice almost over, fielding coach Salahuddin was putting up one skier after another towards Tushar Imran, the last man in the dapper coach's radar. "You can't expect them to come to you," said Salahuddin to the talented middle-order batsman, who was visibly waning after a tough day's workout at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

But he had enough breath, after his stint under those 20 or so high catches, to admit that the tour for which he is working hard for is quite big, but not make-or-break big.

"I want to be part of this setup

for a longer period of time. Hopefully, I can get a big knock that will ease the pressure. That is what I am looking for," said Tushar after morning's training session of the Tigers, who are preparing for this month's tour of New Zealand.

"It will be a vital tour because I would also like to establish my place in the Test side."

That big knock has long been elusive to Tushar. Two fifties in 39 one-day internationals is mediocre collection for a batsman of his quality. Both those knocks came early in his career and since then, nothing has gone right for Tushar at the big stage, although he has become a mainstay in local cricket and has done exceedingly well for Bangladesh A.

As his teammates started gathering their gears under the pleasant

winter afternoon sun, Tushar explained that he took up the responsibility of batting at the crucial number three position during the Tigers' tour of Sri Lanka in July but had failed.

"I have been in and out for so long with little guarantee for place in my earlier days in the Bangladesh team. But I disappointed myself when given the opportunity in Sri Lanka, having had a few good years in domestic cricket and for the A team," said the 24-year-old batsman, who went through all the drills coach Jamie Siddons had prepared for his new charges on the third day of practice.

For most of the batsmen, Siddons had a session each in the centre-wicket and one in the indoors nearby. The centre-wicket

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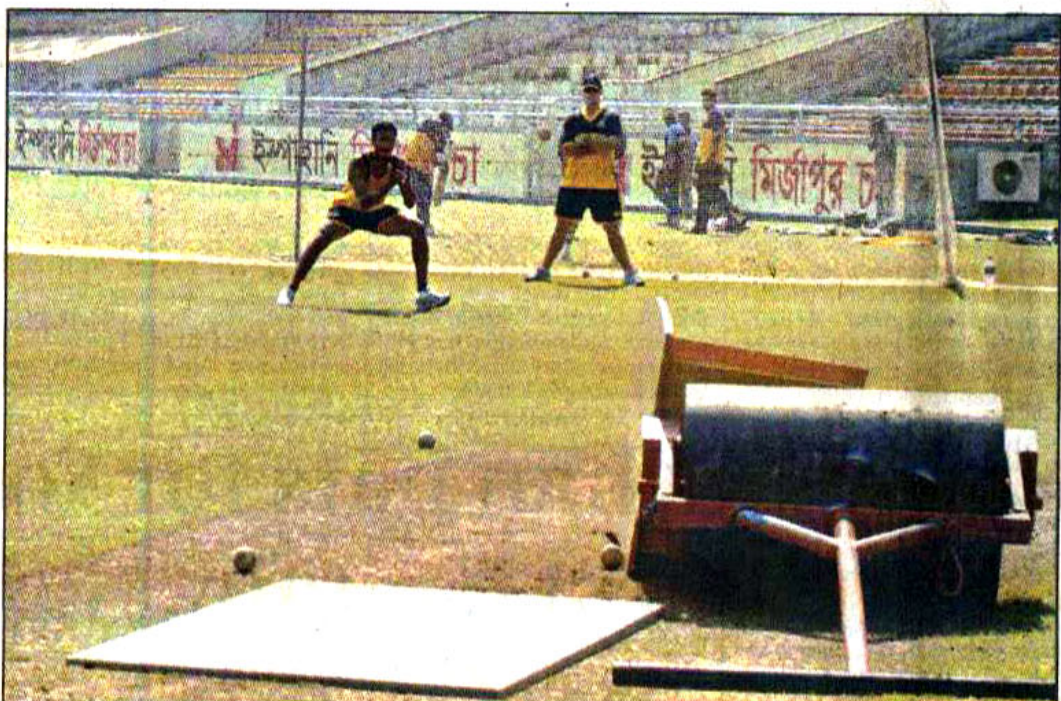


PHOTO: STAR

NOW THAT'S NEW: Bangladesh all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan is about to take a catch during practice in Mirpur yesterday as coach Jamie Siddons, the inventor of this unique method looks on. The ball, delivered at around 75-80mph from a bowling machine, pitches on the shiny marble surface and ricochets on to the slanted wooden table giving Shakib the catch as a normal slip-catching session would be.

One Haq after another



REUTERS, Kolkata

Misbahul Haq's solid run of form is adding steel to a Pakistan middle-order that had started to look a little shaky following the retirement of former skipper Inzamam-ul-Haq.

The 33-year-old stroked a career-defining unbeaten 161 to help save the second Test against India this week, a second important innings under pressure in consecutive matches that has raised hopes he could succeed Inzamam.

Pakistan are now hoping that the right-hander will be capable of joining the experienced duo of Younis Khan and Mohammad Yousuf as the mainstays of the side's batting.

Misbah, who cracked 82 and 45 in the opening Test, has been a prolific scorer in domestic cricket but the veteran was only granted a Test lifeline in October after marking his return to international cricket with a successful World Twenty20 Championship.

The series against South Africa in October -- Inzamam's farewell series -- was Misbah's first in four years, after a promising interna-

tional start was cut short in 2003 following failures against Australia.

Surprisingly picked ahead of Yousuf for the Twenty20 World Cup in South Africa in September, Misbah emerged the side's best batsman and nearly took the team to the title.

"He's proving to be a player who

but I think he can fill the vacuum."

The century was Misbah's first Test hundred in his ninth game and came after he notched his first fifty in the opening Test in what has been a remarkable series for him.

"Day by day I look to improve and better my performance," Misbah told reporters after his century.

The hosts are 1-0 up going into the final Test starting in Bangalore on Saturday after winning the opening Test in New Delhi by six wickets.

India captain Anil Kumble hailed Misbah's powers of concentration.

"He's been really good and shown a lot of character in the four innings he played," leg-spinner Kumble told reporters.

"He looked pretty calm and batted really well. He has a lot of time to play the spinners."

Former Pakistan fast bowler Waqar Younis lamented that Pakistan had delayed Misbah's recall.

"Every time I look at Misbah, I wish Pakistan could have had him in the team much earlier," he wrote in a newspaper column.

"He is just the kind of batsman Pakistan have been looking for, someone who is ready to fight it out."



MISBAHUL HAQ



PHOTO: AFP

WHERE IS VRR IN THIS SINGH CLAN: Indian players Harbhajan Singh (L), Yuvraj Singh (C) and Mahendra Singh Dhoni take a jog during a practice session at the Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bangalore on Thursday.