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Braving the chilly wind of a very cold winter evening, girls take part in a colourful display during the opening ceremony of the Protiti Pharma Club Cup football tournament at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

## Six bowlers banned

SPORTS REPORTER

Six bowlers including Faisal Hossain, Jamaluddin Babu, and Wacorn Palash were adjudicated to have illegal action and will not be allowed to bowl in the upcoming Premier and First Division Leagues.

The BCB bowling review advisory group met yesterday to determine the legality of bowlers on the suspect action list provided by umpires during last season and the recently-included National Cricket League. The group then made recommendations to the BCB on the status of each bowler deemed to have a suspect action.

Off-spinner Imran Parvez, among the six banned bowlers, has already taken up umpiring while Saifullah Khan was the venue manager at the Rajshahi Divisional Stadium.

Fahad Hossain, who bowled Rajshahi to a victory with a five-wicket haul with his innocuous off-spin, is among the Grade 1 bowlers.

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## Badda bite Abahani

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

B. League champions Abahani got off to a wretched start to the new season when they crashed 1-0 to Senior Division side Badda Jagarani in the opening match of the Protiti Pharma Club Cup football tournament yesterday.

Before a meagre 1,000 spectators, a freezing and dank evening at the Bangabandhu National Stadium turned nightmare for the professionals from Dhanmondi, who failed to make any impact even after conceding an early second half goal.

Two minutes after the break, Badda striker Milon capitalised on a defensive lapse between rival defenders Nazrul and Siraj to sneak inside the box before coolly placing a low left-footer into the near post of Biplob at the Abahani goal.

With a starting line-up featuring ten current and ex-Bangladesh

internationals, everyone anticipated a fightback from the sky-blues who otherwise dominated the first half.

But even three changes by coach Amalash Sen in the last half hour made no impact on Badda's lead.

Badda, among the top five in the ongoing Senior Division League, have suffered two defeats so far but their integrity was much better than the disoriented Abahani booters, who created only a half chance to equalise in the dying moments.

But Abul's header from a melee was brilliantly punched over by goalkeeper Nehal for a corner.

In the first half, Abahani enjoyed superior ball possession but it were their rivals who opened up the first real chance after 18 minutes. But skipper Mintu's sidevolley was off target after Nasir broke down the right.

A low drive by Pranotosh eight minutes later ran wide after beating Badda keeper Nehal, who made a diving save to deny Emily's glancing header on a cross by rightback Siraj

in the half hour -- the best chance of

the game for the local giants. Abahani's guest attacker Robin then picked up Tipu with a cheeky chip but the veteran, having recast past Nehal, shot the ball onto a defensive wall from a tight angle minutes later.

Abahani came alive in the last five minutes but Tipu's first attempt, a low header on a left-flank cross, missed the far post before the striker was denied by Rashed inside the six-yard box.

Abahani's hopes to take the lead was dashed again when Emily's long range drive kissed the upper side of the crossbar in the 44th minute.

To ensure a place in the semifinals from the group, Abahani now must beat Dhaka Wanderers in their next match as well as contenders Muktiyoddha Sangsad.

Earlier, organiser Mohammedan Sporting Club's efforts to stage a gala evening party for the eight-team meet was spoiled due to inclement weather as the performers carried out their tasks before

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## BFF seeks Hammam's appointment

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has taken the decision to send a tri-party delegation to the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) to meet its president Mohammad Bin Hammam in a bid to solve the conflict between football organisers of the country.

After an emergency meeting on Tuesday night, the BFF sent a letter to the AFC seeking an appointment from Hammam as soon as possible. The BFF Bangladesh Olympic Association and National Sports Council are expected to have representatives in the delegation.

The football organisers -- off BFF and outside the federation -- in the country are virtually divided on the issue of forming FAs in districts and divisions under FIFA directive.

Many believe that the immunity from the FIFA has inspired the incumbent officials to stay in power by any means, neglecting real organisers in forming the football associations.

FIFA's directive to not involve any government officials in FAs has also put the game's future in the country in question as all the grounds are owned and maintained by the government.

## Boeta quits int'l cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Boeta Dippenaar, the South Africa batsman, has announced his retirement from international cricket to concentrate on building a life beyond the sport.

"Where my cricket career stands now, I have to make the tough call and step away," he told News 24 on Tuesday. "I want to improve my qualifications for life after cricket. Even if I were in the national team now I would have announced my retirement at the end of the season."

Dippenaar, 30, made his debut in 1999 but it took him a further 12 months to register his first hundred. Soon after, he lost his place to Herschelle Gibbs -- a batsman of complete contrast to Dippenaar, whose strengths were his sweet timing and orthodox defence.

In spite of a healthy first-class record for Eagles and Free State, amassing nearly 9000 runs at 42.99, he couldn't translate that same form into his international career, though he found some success in one-dayers with 3421 runs and four hundreds.

Captain of the Eagles, who this week won the SuperSport Series title, Dippenaar will also play for Leicestershire in 2008.

"Some people may question my decision but it is something that my wife and I have reached certainty about during the past year," he said. "I am grateful for the opportunities I have had. I am grateful that I was able to represent my country and I wish the national team all the best."

## NCL stars drafted

### Tigers' prep camp from Feb 1

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

In a break from tradition, national selectors yesterday announced names of 39 players split into three teams for the preparatory camp ahead of South Africa's tour of Bangladesh next month.

The teams A, B and C face each other in six 50-over matches at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium beginning on February 1. Usually a shorter preliminary squad is announced for pre-series camps but due to coach Jamie Siddons's emphasis on match practice, such measure was taken.

All players who travelled to New Zealand last month were included in the teams, apart from 17 leading performers from the National Cricket League.

Veteran left-arm spinner Mohammad Rafique, who passed a fitness test yesterday, was included along with left-arm paceman Syed Rasel.

The economical Rasel, who dislocated his shoulder during an early practice match in New

Zealand, was named in Team C.

Mohammad Ashraf, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and Shakib Al Hasan will lead the three teams respectively.

The NCL performers were predictably called up as the likes of Nazimuddin, Rokibul Hasan, Tariq Aziz and Talha Jubair were rewarded with a place in the camp. NCL's most prolific opening pair of Imrul Kayes and Nazmus Sadat also won places while Siddons will have a first-hand view of the enigmatic Alok Kapali for the first time.

Nazimuddin, who was first called up to the national setup during the Twenty20 World Championships in South Africa, aggregated 720 runs in ten first-class matches. Kapali scored 620 in as many matches with a top-score of 168.

Left-arm spinner Mosharraf Hossain, touted by Rafique as his long-term replacement, started with both bat and ball. He was the top wicket-taker with 44 wickets and won a few matches for Dhaka in the one-day competition.

After a disastrous first assignment in New Zealand, it is another opportunity for Siddons to evaluate his batsmen under match conditions before facing another

big opponent.

The 6-match series ends on February 6 after which the Rafiqul Alam-led selection panel will announce a 13-member side for the first Test against South Africa at Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium on February 22.

SQUADS

**Team A:** Zunaed Siddiqui, Tamim Iqbal, Habibul Bashar, Mohammad Ashraf (captain), Rokibul Hasan, Mehrob Hossain, Mushfiqur Rahim (wicketkeeper), Forhad Reza, Mosharraf Hossain, Mahbulul Alam, Sajidul Islam, Talha Jubair, Shamsur Rahman.

**Team B:** Imrul Kayes, Nazmus Sadat, Jahurul Islam, Nazimuddin, Shahriar Nafees, Mahmudullah Riyad, Dhiman Ghosh (wicketkeeper), Abdur Razzak, Nazmul Hossain, Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (captain), Shahadat Hossain, Alok Kapali, Tariqul Islam.

**Team C:** Javed Omer Belim, Rajin Saleh, Aftab Ahmed, Tushar Imran, Shakib Al Hasan (captain), Naem Islam, Khaled Mashud (wicketkeeper), Tariq Aziz, Mohammed Rafique, Syed Rasel, Enamul Haque, Mohammad Shahjada, Kamrul Islam.

## Another easy Pak win

Cricket

AFP, Faisalabad

Mohammad Yousuf's brilliant century and Shoaib Malik's all-round contribution helped Pakistan overwhelm Zimbabwe by seven wickets in the fourth one-day match here on Wednesday.

Captain Malik grabbed 3-55 as the tourists were bowled out for 244 before Yousuf hit an unbeaten 108 and Malik notched up an attractive 88 to help their team successfully chase the target in 47 overs.

The win, which lifted the home team to a 4-0 lead in the five-match series, came in Pakistan's world record 673rd one-day match. India previously held the record of playing the most limited-over internationals with 672.

Malik, who turns 26 on Saturday, added 141 runs for the third wicket with Yousuf to steady Pakistan's chase after they lost openers Nasir Jamshed (11) and Khalid Latif (19) by the 15th over.

Yousuf delighted the packed 16,000 Iqbal Stadium with slick timing, hitting ten boundaries and

a six in his 111-ball knock for his 14th one-day hundred -- the only century in the series so far.

Malik, who has failed to find the bat in the last two matches, found his touch as he reached his half-century off 57 balls with seven boundaries.

The pair subdued the Zimbabwe attack and reached what appeared to be a respectable target with ease.

Malik said he was not disappointed on missing a century. "I think it was my fault. I ran hastily," said Malik, who ran himself out a second time in the series. "A win is more important than a personal milestone and I am happy with the team's consistency."

Zimbabwe owed their total to a defiant stand of 85 between Tatenda Taibu (51) and Sean Williams (48), who repaired the early loss of Vusi Sibanda (three) and Hamilton Masakadza (two) -- both leg-before to paceman Kamran Hussain.

It was Malik who broke the third-wicket partnership when he caught Williams off his own bowling, before sending Brendon Taylor (seven) and Taibu back to leave the tourists struggling at 132-5 in the

30th over. Keith Dabengwa spoiled Malik's figures in the end, taking 19 off the last over to finish with 45 -- studded with three boundaries and two sixes.

Taibu managed four boundaries during his 76-ball knock, while Williams hit a six and four boundaries in his innings which lasted 56 deliveries.

Chamu Chibhabha (30) and Elton Chigumbura (24) also chipped in with useful contributions.

Masakadza said his team is learning fast. "We, as a team, are disappointed on losing four matches, but we are learning how to play spin in Pakistan and this experience will help us in future," he said.

Pakistan rested experienced batsman Younis Khan, wicketkeeper Kamran Akmal, Yasir Arafat and Salman Butt for this match and awarded one-day debuts to opener Khalid Latif and paceman Sohail Khan.

They also included Fawad Alam and wicketkeeper Sarfraz Ahmed. Zimbabwe, without their injured captain Prosper Uteya for a second match in a row, were further depleted after paceman

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Pakistan's mainstay Mohammad Yousuf sweeps fine during his match-winning century against Zimbabwe in the fourth one-day international at the Iqbal Stadium in Faisalabad yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## ICC slip helps Bhajji

Judge never felt strain

Cricket

AFP, Adelaide

India off-spinner Harbhajan Singh was cleared of racially abusing Australia's Andrew Symonds due to lack of evidence, rather than any external pressure, appeals commissioner John Hansen said Wednesday.

Harbhajan was cleared by the New Zealand judge at an International Cricket Council appeal hearing on Tuesday, ending weeks of speculation over whether India would cancel their tour if the suspension stood.

The decision was followed by media reports that Cricket Australia and the Board of Cricket Control for India had brokered a deal that would see the charges

downgraded. Hansen downgraded the racism charge to one of using general obscene, offensive or insulting language, overturned a suspension and fined Harbhajan 50 percent of his match fee, but said it was because he could not be certain that he called Symonds, Australia's only black player, a "big monkey".

"I have not felt under any pressure because of such media reports and I would never be influenced or succumb to such pressure, real or imagined," he said.

"It is incorrect to suggest that there was some sort of an agreement reached between Australian and Indian cricket authorities that I simply rubber-stamped. I also wish to add that while I was aware of the media furore surrounding this matter, no-one has attempted to apply direct pressure to obtain

an outcome."

Hansen said it was clear the Australians -- Symonds, Michael Clarke and Matthew Hayden -- were sure the comment had been made, but noted Indian star Sachin Tendulkar was equally adamant it hadn't, and pointed to complicating factors that cast doubt on the trio's evidence.

The judge noted they could not recall other comments made during the incident, and said the complicating factors of "different languages, accents and cultures" cast doubt over what transpired, especially with Harbhajan immediately denying the claim to umpire Mark Benson.

"I need to be sure and if I am left with an dishonest and reasonable uncertainty, then I must find in favour of Mr Singh," he said.

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## Aussie media furious

Cricket

AFP, Sydney

Australian media Wednesday described India's threat to quit their cricket tour if a racist abuse charge against Harbhajan Singh was not dropped as an "abomination".

Under the front-page headline "Cricket's day of shame", The Sydney Morning Herald said Australian officials had angered their own players by caving in to India's demands that the charge be downgraded to use of obscene language.

Harbhajan was initially handed a three-Test ban by match referee Mike Procter for allegedly calling Australia's only black player,

Andrew Symonds, a "monkey" during the acrimonious second Test in Sydney.

On Tuesday, Harbhajan pleaded guilty to the lesser charge of using abusive language and was fined 50 percent of his match fee by International Cricket Council (ICC) appeals commissioner John Hansen.

The Herald said the decision amounted to a "straight sets victory" for India, which twice threatened to abandon the tour and also had umpire Steve Bucknor sacked from the series after complaining about some of his decisions.

Cricketing writer Peter Roebuck lashed the Indians' actions, saying chartering a plane to take the players home in the event of an adverse finding was "amongst the most

nakedly aggressive actions taken in the history of a notoriously fractious game".

"If this is the way the Indian board intends to conduct its affairs hereafter, then God help cricket," he wrote.

"It's high time that the elders of the game in that proud country stopped playing to the gallery and considered the game's wider interests."

"Brinkmanship or not, threatening to take their bat and ball home in the event of a resented verdict being allowed to stand was an abomination. It set a dreadful precedent. What price justice now?"

The Australian, under the front-page headline "Cricket caves in to India's demands", said India had "again held a gun to the game's

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## India inspire Lawson

Cricket

AFP, Faisalabad

Pakistan coach Geoff Lawson Wednesday said India's performance against Australia was an inspiration for world cricket, strengthening belief that world champions are beatable.

India, despite losing the series 2-1 earlier this week, pushed Australia hard and became the first side to win a Test Under for four years.

"India's performance is an inspiration for the whole cricket world and other teams will have it in their mind that Australia are beatable when they play them," Lawson told AFP.

"Australia is still the world number one team but to get beaten at Perth, of all the places, shows that other teams can also beat them and I think India has shown the way."

Lawson's team face Australia -- subject to security clearance -- in Pakistan in March-April. Australia are scheduled to play three Tests, five one-day internationals and a Twenty20 match.

The 50-year-old Australian former paceman said he believed his team too have a chance against the world champions.

"We pushed India hard despite injuries and illness," said Lawson of Pakistan's tour across the border last month, where they lost the three-Test series 1-0 and one-day

series 3-2. "When we can push India hard despite problems, we can also challenge the best team in the world if we play to our potential," said Lawson, who played 46 Tests for Australia in the 1980s.

But he dismissed claims that Australia were struggling to take 20 wickets in a Test in the absence of champion leg-spinner Shane Warne and fast bowler Glenn McGrath -- who both retired last year.

"It was a great series and the Australian bowling was up against a formidable Indian batting, but I disagree that Australia do not have bowlers to take 20 wickets, they still are a formidable side."

Lawson said Australia will miss

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**Matthew Hayden**  
(Star Australian opening batsman) "I'm now the oldest in the team but I'm also enjoying my cricket." While revealing that he has no intention to retire anytime soon.



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