

Rani Hamid retains crown

SPORTS REPORTER

Ace chess player Rani Hamid retained the national women's crown when the IWM defeated Shamiha Sharmin Shimmi in the 11th and final round of the Aromatic Gold 29th National Women's Chess Championship at the chess federation hall-room yesterday.

Rani secured her record 17th title in the women's competition with ten points while 2005 champion WFM Shamima Akhter Liza finished runner-up with 9.5 points.

Nazrana Khan Eva finished third with eight points, WFM Syeda Shabana Parveen Nipa fourth with seven while WFM's Tanima Parveen and Zakia Sultana will lock horns in today's play-off for the fifth-sixth places.

Kenya names Kirsten as coach

AFP, Nairobi

South African Andy Kirsten has accepted terms to coach Kenya until the 2009 World Cup qualifying competition, Cricket Kenya officials said on Monday.

The 44-year-old, who was assistant coach to Indian Sandeep Patil during the country's sensational performance in the 2003 World Cup where they reached the semi-finals, is expected to take up the new role in April.

"Yes we have agreed terms with Kirsten," Cricket Kenya chief Samir Inamdar told AFP. "The only thing we are awaiting is his confirmation that he would start work by mid-April."

Kirsten, who played 11 first class internationals for his country, is a member of the legendary South African cricketing family that includes his half brother Gary who took over as new coach of India last December.

He will replace former West Indies legend Roger Harper who opted not to renew his two-year contract last September and returned home to the Caribbean.

Inamdar said Kirsten's ultimate task is to ensure Kenya qualifies for the 2011 Cricket World Cup in the Asian sub-continent.

It is the first time since 1999 that the east Africans will have to go through the qualifiers after earning automatic berths to the 2003 and 2007 competitions.

His phone

FROM PAGE 17 approval. The ride for this lad from the backwaters of Bangladesh cricket has now met a great destination.

"I began from school cricket and then during those days, I used to play district leagues around Jamalpur. Then I was selected for the regional under-17s from where I was picked for the under-19 World Cup team in 2006," informed Rokibul, known for his big smile.

"Nobody ever told me that I would play for Bangladesh until I played that three-day warm-up against South Africa (in Fatullah). Since then, I have heard that I was close to get a call.

"All I wanted to do since then was working harder on my game," said Rokibul.

Bashar, Mashud

FROM PAGE 17 Pakistani batsman Zahirul Elahi, who came at number three, settled for an unusually slow 28 off 46 balls with two fours and one six while Sumon Barua made highest 29 not out.

Milon was the most economic of Torun bowlers, taking 2-25 with his medium pace while seamers Delwar Hossain and Mohammad Sharif also took two wickets each. Pakistan's 17-year-old leg-spinner Saad Nasim captured 2-34 on his Dhaka debut.

In the wake of bad weather, the Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolitan revised the fixture.

Abahani will play BKSP at Dhanmohi Cricket Stadium and Mohammedan face Partex at Fatullah today.

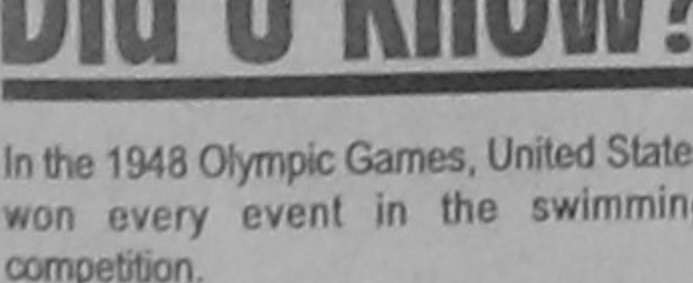
Today's matches have been shifted to March 8.

SCORES IN BRIEF

CITY CLUB: 149-8 in 39 overs (Zahoor 28, Mabud 23, Sumon 29*, Salahuddin 20, Rashedul 12, extras 9, Delwar 2-34, Sharif 2-30, Milon 2-25, Nasim 2-30).

SURJO TORUN: 150-7 in 38 overs (Bashar 65*, Mashud 40, Milon 16, extras 12, Shaqaf 3-22, Salahuddin 3-22, Sumon 1-41).

Result: Surjo Torun win by three wickets.



In the 1948 Olympic Games, United States won every event in the swimming competition.



Rani Hamid shows her composure on way to win the National Women's Chess Championship title during the final round at the Bangladesh Chess Federation hall-room yesterday.

Chance for Robin

AFP, Chittagong

South African left-arm spinner Robin Peterson looks set to board the flight for India after claiming his maiden five-wicket haul in the second Test against Bangladesh here.

The 28-year-old finished with impressive figures of 5-33 as the Proteas wrapped up the two-Test series against Bangladesh with a comprehensive innings and 205-run win here on Monday.

Captain Graeme Smith was quick to acknowledge the contribution of Peterson in the win and backed him for a place in the squad for the three-Test series against India beginning later this month.

"Robin did really well in the game. He adds value to the team if there's turn in the pitch," Smith said.

"We've said before also that we want to take two spinners to the sub-continent. Paul Harris has obviously done very well for us and he's coming back now. But Robin's performed so well he's probably moved into that second slot."

With Peterson coming strongly

into the picture, it appears there might be no place for Johan Botha, who was drafted into the squad for Bangladesh in place of a then injured Harris.

Peterson, who has 14 wickets from six Tests, got a look-in for the second match after being ignored for the first in Dhaka.

His show in Chittagong seems to have filled the last gap in the puzzle as it was the spin-bowling department that had been causing team management worries ahead of the India tour.

Coach Mickey Arthur said he was pleased with the mix-up of the Test squad as the pacemen and spinners had proved they could bowl with success on sub-continental wickets.

"We had a plan when we arrived here. We wanted to master the reverse swing on these tracks and we did that well," he said.

"There's still a little tweaking to do. We used the bouncer, one of our main weapons on these slow and low wickets, to good effect and the biggest thing is that we have proved we have the right mix in our attack to take 20 wickets."

"Everything has looked good about this squad here and we look

forward to the Indian trip," he said.

Smith was also pleased that his bowling attack could adapt to the tough conditions and singled out speedster Dale Steyn for special praise.

Steyn was declared player of the series after picking up 14 wickets from the two Tests. He has now taken 63 wickets from nine Tests this season to emerge as one of the most exciting talents in world cricket.

"Once the batsmen give Dale a sniff, then he barges right through the door. He is doing so well at the moment," Smith said.

"Dale was backed up well by Makhaya Ntini and even Morne Morkel -- it was a huge learning curve for him, he was bowling on the sub-continent for the first time," Smith said.

He added that the performance of the team against Bangladesh, especially the bowlers, would give every player a lot of confidence going into the India series.

"This was a really good Test for us and I'm very happy. We thought about things and implemented them before we get to India and we got our game in place in these conditions."

Lawson expects worst

AFP, Sydney

Pakistan's coach Geoff Lawson says he fears Australia will pull out of their scheduled tour due to start at the end of the month amid safety concerns.

Cricket Australia (CA) and the Australian Cricketers' Association will meet foreign ministry officials in Canberra on Wednesday for the latest information on the security situation in Pakistan following a spate of bombings.

CA is expected to send delegates to the nation in mid-March, but Lawson is already braced for a withdrawal.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India has also warned Australia that it would take a dim view of any cancellation of the abridged tour, due to start March 29.

"The (Pakistan Cricket Board) seems to be pretty negative about (the tour), only because the corre-

spondence they've been receiving from Cricket Australia has been negative," Lawson told The Age newspaper from Lahore.

"Pretty much everything they've heard from CA has been a hedging of bets in case they decide not to come.

"The PCB have been pretty disappointed by the comments.

"Everyone here knows there would be no problem with the tour, yet the more likely scenario seems to be that it won't happen from what we're hearing."

Australian player Andrew Symonds has repeatedly said he is unlikely to make himself available if the tour went ahead.

Lawson warned that cancelling the tour would have a disastrous effect on Pakistan cricket and create more ill feeling against the Australians.

He was particularly concerned that some Australian players were viewing a cancellation as an opportunity to grab some of the cash on

offer in the Indian Premier League, which clashes with the tour.

"It would be a terrific coincidence," Lawson said.

"You would like to think that wouldn't be what it was about, but the amounts of money being talked about are massive.

"To a certain degree, it's pretty embarrassing to be over here and hearing some of the stuff being said."

"When people here read what (Andrew) Symonds has had to say about touring Pakistan, there is a lot of shaking of the head. There is no knowledge behind those comments whatsoever. Australian players don't realise how important the game is to other countries."

"This decision is far bigger than just the fate of a few matches. "It's the precedent it would set, it would give everybody an out from coming here because 'that's what Australia did'."

Lawson also said the tour would offer average Pakistanis relief from the concerns of their daily lives.

Axe falls on Rahim

FROM PAGE 17 chart this season with 720 runs.

"We suffered a big blow with the injury of Aftab (Ahmed) in the second Test and Nazimuddin is his replacement. He has a similar attacking batting style to Aftab and was the top run-scorer in the first-class competition this season," said Rafiq.

He also added that Rokibul was there as a back-up batsman. The young batsman from Jamalpur, who plies his trade for Mohammedan these days, scored three fifties and a century in the one-day version of this year's competition and is also the only Bangladesh batsman to have scored a first-class triple hundred.

"He (Rokibul) looked good in the warm-up match in Fatullah against the tourists where he made 40-odd. He is also a solid batsman and a good fielder," added Rafiq.

There was little debate on 27-year-old Rubel's inclusion but the chief selector suggested that they considered an off-spin option for the all-rounder spot.

The fearful batsman of the 1980s said, "We also considered Mahmudullah Riyad as an all-rounder but Mosharraf Hossain got in through the sheer weight of his performance in domestic, A team and Academy matches."

The tall left-arm spinner was the highest wicket-taker in the first-class competition with 44 wickets in 10 matches and has also impressed with the bat, scoring 315 runs in the one-day competition

for Dhaka. In the first Premier League match this season, Rubel smacked 86 and then took four wickets for Bangladesh Biman against Partex on March 2.

Left-handed opener Shahriar Nafees, who played his last one-day international in Sri Lanka last year, made a comeback after being overlooked for the New Zealand tour.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Cricket Board XI for the warm-up game on Friday at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium against South Africa was also named yesterday.

Shakib Al Hasan with Nazimuddin as his deputy will skipper the team.

S'pore to host 2010 Youth Olympics

PRESS RELEASE

Singapore has been chosen as the host city for the inaugural Youth Olympic Games in 2010.

The 12-day event, to be held in August, is expected to draw 3,200 athletes, aged between 14 and 18 years, who will compete in 26 sport-gymnastics categories.

Lim Neo Chian, deputy chairman and chief executive, Singapore Tourism Board told regarding this event that, the event enabling local athletes to pit their abilities against the best in the world.

LOCAL SNIPPETS

SPORTS REPORTER

A blistering 44 not out by Babu paved Bangladesh Boys' way to a 54-run win victory against Dhaka Mariners in yesterday's lone First Division Cricket League match.

Babu smashed three fours and four sixes in just 16 deliveries as Boys scored 188-8 in the rain-curtailed 24-overs match at the Dhaka University ground.

In reply, Mariners were all out for 134 in 20.1 overs.

NAT'L CHESS

The qualifying rounds of the 34th National Chess Championship will begin today at the chess federation hall-room.

The top nine players of the 11-round Swiss League competition will join automatic qualifiers -- Grandmasters Niaz Murshed, Ziaur Rahman, Reefat Bin Sattar, Abdullah Al Rakib and IM Enamul Hossain Rajib in the finals.

AMOL, RANJAN CRUISE

The two top seeds, Amol Roy and Ranjan Ram, advanced to the semifinals of both the men's singles and doubles events of the Jabbar Memorial tennis tournament.

Top seeded Amol, who defeated Niranjan Ram 6-4, 6-3 in the singles quarterfinals, paired with Ranjan to win the doubles match against Mukta-Sohel pair 6-0, 6-1. Second-seeded Ranjan beat Anwar Hossain 6-2, 6-1 in his singles match.

Alamgir Hossain and Delwar Hossain are the other singles semi-finalists.

Japanese player Ayumi set a final clash against Ishrat Sultana in the women's singles while the boys' under-14 and 16 competitions also reached the final stage.

ESS IN LAST 8

European Standard School (ESS) crushed Summerfield 3-0 to reach the quarterfinals of the GMG Airlines School Champions Trophy football tournament.

Sagar scored a brace and Tahsin the other goal for ESS at the Banani Chairmanbari ground.

Green Herald posted a massive 9-0 on the day while Aga Khan School blanked Oxford International School 3-0.

In today's quarterfinals, Mastermind will face Playpen and Green Herald will take on Maple Leaf.

Shoaib irate at PCB

PTI, Karachi

Unfazed by the Pakistan Cricket Board's decision of denying him a central contract, mercurial pacer Shoaib Akhtar once again hit out at PCB officials, saying they were oblivious to the problems faced by players.

Shoaib lashed out at the Board for being "unfair" in its treatment of players like Danish Kaneria, Shahid Afridi and Abdul Razzaq.

"All these are great players who have given a lot of services to the nation and yet the board has not realised this and has treated them unfairly," Shoaib said in an interview to Geo TV.

"It is sad that some people in the board who sit in air-conditioned rooms are making decisions on cricketers who earn their place in the team after much hard work and sacrifices," he stated.

The board's selection committee had dropped all-rounder, Razzaq for the Twenty20 World Cup last year after which he joined the Indian Cricket League. Since then it has refused to talk to him.

In Afridi's case he was overlooked for Pakistan's captaincy, while the board has also issued a notice to Kaneria for a statement against the central contracts in which he has been demoted.

A reward

FROM PAGE 17

"I feel there is still enough time to prepare for the SAFF Championship, provided I get help of all the quarters," he added.

With less than three months to go for the SAFF Championship in Sri Lanka and Maldives, Yusuf will have to start training pronto.

"A lot will also depend on the conditions of the players because they would be coming after the off-season. It would be better if we pick up a small squad for starter," said the former international who wants to pick his lot.

"I would like to pick my team because if I fail, I will have to shoulder all the responsibilities. However, sometimes other eyes are helpful because a coach might miss someone."

"It's true we have limited facilities but I want to squeeze the maximum practice out of it because the AFC Challenge Cup is a tough tournament for us."

Bangladesh are pitted against hosts Kyrgyzstan, Laos and Afghanistan in the Challenge Cup qualifiers to be held from May 5-10 and face Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Bhutan in the group stages of SAFF soccer in Colombo from June 3-14.

When asked whether he would consider recently retired players or those who chose not to play under past coaches, Yusuf said he would go for the best team.

"I mean not those players who were at their peak two years ago. I will pick those who are in form and fitness now."

NZ keep spin option

First Test against England from today

Cricket

CRICINFO, Hamilton

New Zealand's captain, Daniel Vettori, has indicated that his side are preparing to take two spinners into Wednesday's first Test at Hamilton. The Wellington off-spinner, Jeetan Patel, is set to claim the final place in the starting line-up ahead of Mark Gillespie, who was belatedly drafted into the squad as cover after his fellow paceman Iain O'Brien injured his big toe during net practice on Monday.

"We're leaning towards two spinners," said Vettori. "The pitch is a lot drier than it was in the one-day, there's not a lot of moisture, but we've got the right to have a look in the morning (and assess) the overhead conditions because we know it can swing here with a bit of humidity."

Patel, 27, has only played once before in Test cricket. He made his debut on New Zealand's tour of South Africa in May 2006, where he picked up 3 for 117 in his solitary innings at Cape Town. "He'll have a few nerves but we've prepared him pretty well," said Vettori. "We've given him an indication there's a high chance of playing two spinners."

Patel suffered the ignominy of being struck for four sixes in a row by Dimitri Mascareñas during the Twenty20s, but bounced back well in the first ODI at Wellington, where he took 2 for 14 in 6.4 overs to

help bowl England out for 130. "He only played twice in the one-day series, but both times he bowled very well, and he's also coming off a bit of cricket down in Dunedin," said Vettori. "He's had a chance to prepare, rather than being told on the morning of the game, 'you're in the team, go get em.'"

Barring a late change of heart, Gillespie will be released from the squad shortly before the toss as O'Brien is expected to be available for selection for the second Test at Wellington, which starts on March 13. Gillespie recently battled back from a shoulder injury and was unlucky to miss the initial cut after impressing for the New Zealand Select XI during England's final warm-up match in Dunedin last week. He bowled with fire and aggression to take 3 for 62 in 14.1 overs, as England were bowled out for 131 in their first innings.

"He's missed out due to injury which is, always tough, but I've been impressed with the way he's battled back," said New Zealand's captain, Daniel Vettori. "It's not easy sitting on the sidelines with an injury you're not too sure of, but the way he fought back into the side with his performances down in Dunedin was pleasing."

New Zealand's new-ball pairing of Kyle Mills and Chris Martin will be in need of some confident back-up after the treatment that was meted out to them by their teammate, Brendon McCullum, during the final of the State Shield in Auckland on Sunday. McCullum, playing for Otago, laid into both

men -- especially Martin, whose eight overs went for 81 -- during a breathtaking innings of 170 from 108 balls.

"The thing with Brendan is he's always a confident guy so it doesn't matter what form he's in," said Vettori, "but when you see a guy in a purple patch like he is at the moment, it's a little bit inspirational. We all sat back and watched the State Shield final and just admired what was an amazing innings. Hopefully Chris and Kyle have edited it from their memories."

McCullum was sure that no lasting damage had been done to their morale. "They know the ground, the pitch and the format was completely different to what we're going to head into now," he told The New Zealand Herald. "It was a flat wicket and the boundaries are pretty small. They're both fantastic bowlers and I'm sure one game won't affect them too much."

TEAMS

NEW ZEALAND (from): Daniel Vettori (captain), Matthew Bell, Jamie How, Stephen Fleming, Ross Taylor, Matthew Sinclair, Jacob Oram, Brendon McCullum, Kyle Mills, Jeetan Patel, Chris Martin, Grant Elliot, Mark Gillespie. ENGLAND (from): Michael Vaughan (captain), Alastair Cook, Andrew Strauss, Kevin Pietersen, Ian Bell, Paul Collingwood, Tim Ambrose, Ryan Sidebottom, Matthew Hoggard, Steve Harmison, Monty Panesar.

Bhajji blasts crowds

Cricket

APP, Sydney

India spinner Harbhajan Singh has lashed out at Australian crowds after being cleared of allegations he made monkey gestures and spat toward fans in the tri-series final win against Australia.

Harbhajan was cleared after match referee Jeff Crowe was unable to find any video evidence to confirm the claims by spectators and photographers.

The spinner was shielded from the media when India arrived in Brisbane on Monday to prepare for Tuesday's second match in the tri-series finals, but The Daily Telegraph newspaper reported Harbhajan was appalled by the abuse he got from the crowd.

"Trust me, I didn't say anything to the crowd, but the language they said to me was despicable," he told The Daily Telegraph.

"It crossed all limits of decency. I

had smoke coming out of my ears."

The outspoken spinner has been public enemy No.1 with Australian fans and players since clashing with Andrew Symonds in India last year.

He was suspended for three Tests after the second Test at the Sydney Cricket Ground in January for allegedly calling Symonds a monkey, but the suspension was overturned at an International Cricket Council appeal hearing, also due to a lack of evidence.

Last week, Harbhajan was called an "obnoxious weed" by Matthew Hayden and responded by claiming the Australian opener was one of the least liked players in world cricket.

Harbhajan told The Daily Telegraph he did not spit at the crowd and simply spat out drinking water between overs, but was less sure about the alleged monkey antics.

"I don't remember what I was doing," he said.

The Age newspaper quoted

several spectators who were adamant Harbhajan did spit, and make monkey gestures.

"He did the monkey gesture halfway to the boundary, before he could have heard what the crowd were saying," The Age quoted one as saying.

"He has been accused twice of racially abusing Andrew Symonds, and if they are going to lie about this, it calls into question the other denials."

The Age also quoted Niranjan Shah, secretary of the Board of Control for Cricket in India, warning that Australian players could be in for an unpleasant reception when they tour India later in the year.

"Let Australia come to us and see what the crowd might do," he said. "It's not a good thing, people must forget."

"All these reports are unnecessary, when your team comes here, if it's too much media attention maybe there will be the same crowd behaviour in India."

Ali Daei was surprised

Football

AFP, Tehran

Iran's world record scorer in international football Ali Daei on Tuesday admitted he was surprised by his shock appointment as the coach to rescue the flagging fortunes of the national side.

"Choosing me for the post of Team Melli coach was a surprise," Daei told his first news conference after his appointment on Sunday, the ISNA news agency reported.

"You all know how I left the Team Melli and now I have returned this way," Daei added, reiterating his bitterness over being dropped after Iran's humiliating first round exit in the 2006 World Cup.

"I love my reputation more than

anything. God loves me, now I am where another coach would be in 10 years time," said the self-confident ex-Bayern Munich striker.

Daei's appointment ended a months-long coaching vacuum at the head of one of Asia's top sides which Iran had until now failed to fill despite mooting a dozen top foreign names and twice seemingly appointing a new coach.

It had been widely expected that Iran would appoint Spanish trainer Javier Clemente and when those talks fell through amid a wrangle over living conditions attention turned to Iranian-American Afshin Qotbi.

Iran's next World Cup qualifier is away against Kuwait on March 26 and Daei will be hoping for a better performance than when the team could only manage a goalless draw

against minnows Syria in their last game.

"Unfortunately discipline, which is a principle for a team, has distanced itself from the Team Melli."

"We have a big and difficult work against Kuwait. It is one of the important matches for Iran," he said.

Daei -- one of the biggest celebrities in Iran who also has his own sportswear business -- said he was open to criticism from the press as long as it was fair.

"After the World Cup some papers said that 'Daei is enjoying time on sandy beaches of Las Vegas'. But every one knows that Las Vegas is in the middle of the desert!"

Daei said he would employ two foreign assistant coaches and two Iranian ones, without revealing their names.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS	32 Harbor structure	53 Witness	20 Rural wagon-load
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4 Neuter a horse	34 Cushion	2 "Skedaddle!"	23 Churchgoers' bench
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13 Clarinet companion	37 Fool	5 Certain wood	26 Help
14 Kennedy matriarch	38 "Satisfaction"	6 Protracted	27 Melody
15 A billion years	39 Satisfaction	7 Zageb	28 Floral garland
16 Dresses in	40 Title	8 Drop resident	29 Preceding
17 Newspaper page	41 Mount stat	9 Kachina worshipper	31 Gloss
18 Porch seating, often	42 Fleece	10 Kachina worshipper	32 Mexican money
21 Wall climber	50 Peruke	11 Addict	34 Tarot recipe
22 Chow down	51 Hushed	12 Nurse's trayful	35 Executor's concern
23 Right-on, e.g.	52 Roll-call reply	19 Prop for Ben Franklin or Charlie Brown	36 Scorn
26 Whatever number	Solution time: 27 mins.	37 Moving Caviar	38 Caviar
27 Whatever number		39 Tramar con-	