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Rakib shares top slot

SPORTS REPORTER

Grand Master Abdullah Al Rakib maintained his place on top with two other players in the fifth round of the Mayor Cup International Open Chess tournament in Mumbai yesterday.

Rakib beat Indian International Master Adibhan to share the top slot with GM Safin Shukhrat of Uzbekistan and Tejkumar of India. All three players have five points.

However GM Reefat Bin Sattar went down to share the second position with 13 other players securing 4.5 points after his draw with BK Murali Krishnan. Another Bangladeshi GM Ziaur Rahman lost his fifth round match to Tejkumar and remained at four points.

In the sixth round matches today, Rakib will play against GM Safin Shukhrat, Reefat take on IM Himanshu Sharma of India while Zia face WGM Aarthie Ramaswamy of India.



Did U Know?

Archery was first included as an Olympic sport in 1900, discontinued in 1924, and reintroduced in 1972.



Cristiano Ronaldo
(M'United's Portuguese superstar)
"It's a great feeling to win the league - I don't have the words to describe how it feels to be champions, it's amazing."
After retaining the Premiership title.

What to WATCH

- BTV**
Premier Cricket Super League
Mohammedan v Abahani
Live from 9:00am
- SET Max**
Indian Premier League
Delhi Daredevils v Deccan Chargers
Live from 7:30pm
- STAR Cricket**
England v New Zealand
First Test, Day 1
Live from 4:00pm
- ESPN**
Azlan Shah Hockey
India v Pakistan
Live from 2:00pm
New Zealand v Canada
Live from 4:00pm
Belgium v Malaysia
Live from 6:00pm
Sportscentre India
Sports News
Live at 8:30pm
- STAR Sports**
Hamburg Masters Tennis
Last Sixteen
Live from 3:00pm

Premier Cricket Super League
Mohammedan v Abahani
Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium, Mirpur
Biman v BKSP
Venue: Fatullah Cricket Stadium
Surjo Torun v City Club
Venue: BKSP



The national team players warm up at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday as they begin their final preparation for the SAFF Football Championship.

Veterans recalled

Football
SPORTS REPORTER

Coach Abu Yusuf recalled Arif Khan Joy and Nazrul Islam for next month's SAFF Football Championship in a bid to strengthen Bangladesh's campaign in the regional football extravaganza.

Although Yusuf was reluctant in the initial stage to include footballers out of the 26-member preliminary squad, 'out of fitness ground', that began training late in March, he was convinced that the team needed experienced players.

The realisation came after Bangladesh failed to qualify for the final round of the AFC Challenge Cup.

Bangladesh drew with eventual qualifiers Afghanistan -- one of the group opponents of Yusuf's boys in the SAFF soccer -- and lost to hosts Kyrgyzstan in the qualifying round held in Bishkek from May 3-9.

"Yes, I feel that our midfield was weak and it not only failed to control the game as well as supplying the attackers, it also failed to help the defence," Yusuf told yesterday during the team's first training session after return from the

Challenge Cup.

"We lack a playmaker and also a destroyer. We needed to fill the gaps and the inclusion of Joy and Nazrul is a result of my long discussion with the National Team Management Committee," told the former national defender.

Bangladesh were in a favourable position to qualify when they took a 1-0 lead against Kyrgyzstan but the team's inexperience resulted in too much defensive attitude and the visitors conceded two late goals inside four minutes to lose the battle.

"Our players are more skilled than Afghanistan. The Afghans have a little physical advantage but our football sense and history are much better. If our players give their 50 percent, we would be able to beat them in SAFF," predicted Yusuf.

"My players need more confidence so they do not lose nerves during crucial matches," he added.

Joy joined camp at the Bangabandhu National Stadium Nazrul, who was out of the capital, will be available today.

"The call was unexpected. Still I have decided to shelve my retirement decision for the greater interest of the nation," said former national captain Joy who retired after the inaugural Challenge Cup in 2006.

"I could not avoid such a call and thank the new committee, which has evaluated my ability and past contribution," said the midfielder.

When asked about his fitness he said: "I have trained with the team just for one day. Although I have been playing regularly, my fitness level would not be adequate for national standard. I can only say after a week. If I don't feel fit

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Aminul Haq, Biplab Bhattacharya, Ziaur Rahman;
defenders: Hassan Al Mamun, Nazrul Islam, Anful Islam, Wali Faisal, Rajani Kanta Barman, Abur Rahman Mishu, Mofazzel Hossain Saikat, Arup Kumar Baidya, Mahmudul Hasan, Jahirul Islam;
midfielders: Arif Khan Joy, Arman Aziz, Enamul Haq Sharif, Zahed Parvez, Faisal Mahmud, Maruf Ahmed, Mamunul Islam Mamun, Kabir Hossain, Mobarak Hossain, Kallol Kumar Juku, Abul Hossain; **forwards:** Mehdi Hasan Ujjal, Mohammad Robin, Zahid Hasan Emily, Abdul Balen Komol.

Transfer starts today

Football
SPORTS REPORTER

The transfer of the B. League begins today but most of the clubs have yet to decide on their future in the second edition of the professional football league.

The main problem of the clubs would be financial, admits the officials on the eve of the bourse that will run till June 20.

The Dhaka-based clubs also sat together last night and all agreed that introducing relegation will demoralise their participation. They even sent a letter to the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) threatening to boycott the league if there was relegation.

There was no relegation in the inaugural season but new BFF president Kazi Salahuddin had told the club that he was in favour of introducing the system to make the competition more attractive.

"Last year Rahmatganj spent a huge amount of money but finished 11th. So just money doesn't guarantee success. This is hard time for all and everyone has to realise how difficult it is to form a team under financial constraints," said a club official yesterday.

"That is why we don't want any relegation this time. If the number of team is increased from 11, we will welcome it and all we want is to get the ball roll. If the competitions start, things will ease in near future," commented the official seeking anonymity.

There is every chance that the league will have 12 teams if the B. League committee accepts Rajshahi club Diganta Prasari's application to join the elite competition that has already ensured a handsome sponsorship from

Prime Bank.

Although local giants Mohammedan, Muktijoddha, Brothers and Sheikh Russell will take some time to get active in the market, defending champions Abahani might complete formalities before the national team's departure for the SAFF Championship.

"We want to retain all then play-



Legendary table tennis player Jobera Rahman Linu flashes the V-sign after winning the by-election of the Bangladesh Olympic Association yesterday at the National Sports Council.

Abahani ride on Shuvo brace

Cricket
SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani posted their sixth straight win in the Green Delta Premier Hockey League when the reigning champions thrashed Sonali Bank 4-0 at the Maulana Bhasani National Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Moududul Rahman Shuvo put Abahani ahead after 11 minutes and the league leaders had to remain satisfied with the slim lead at the break.

The bankers, who lost the Club Cup final to Abahani 4-3 last month, fought neck and neck and won three penalty corners against Abahani's two in the first half without any avail.

Shuvo, who later claimed that yesterday's opening goal was his 100th in the league, made it 2-0 two minutes after the breather when he took a pass from Musa Mia.

Musa put the match beyond Bank's reach when the centre-half converted a penalty corner in the 48th minute while Pakistani recruit

Ispahani sponsor for three matches

Cricket
SPORTS REPORTER

Ispahani Mirzapore Tea will sponsor three matches of the Premier Cricket Super League.

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) have selected them as the sponsor for the matches between Abahani and Mohammedan Sporting Club at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium today, Bangladesh Biman and Abahani on May 18 and Mohammedan and Biman on May 21. All of these matches will be telecast live on Bangladesh Television.

According to the contract, the company will pay Tk 4 lakhs to the board for which they will get the privilege of having the naming right, pitch mat behind the stumps at both ends, stumps branding, 10 perimeter boards and press conference.

Linu wins BOA by-election

Cricket
SPORTS REPORTER

Record-breaking former table tennis player-turned official Jobera Rahman Linu was elected a member of the Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA) yesterday.

Linu, a councillor from Bangladesh Cycling Federation, got 29 votes to Jobaidur Rahman Rana's 23 and Ahmedur Rahman's 11 votes in the by-election.

The election commission earlier announced by-election for three member posts -- one from national federations (Olympic events), one from women's sports council and one for former Olympians.

However, Rafia Akhter Dolly and Kazi Shahana Parveen's nominations were cancelled as both candidates failed to meet the criteria.

It means two posts of members of the 37-member executive committee will remain vacant for next four years.

Will it be 3rd in a row? Abahani-Mohammedan clash today

Cricket
SPORTS REPORTER

While Abahani will try to maintain their hundred per cent success against their traditional rivals this season, Mohammedan Sporting Club will desperately want to be third time lucky to stay alive in the title race when they lock horns in a crucial Premier Cricket Super League match today.

The match kicks off at 9am with state-run Bangladesh Television (BTV) beaming live coverage from the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

Prior to the mouthwatering clash, competing coaches Minhazul Abedin and Aminul Islam, who once enthralled the domestic cricket, hoped that their top batsmen join the party like they did during their heydays.

This season's record speak in favour of Abahani as the defending champions won both the Premier Twenty20 match and the first round encounter against their bitter rivals by two wickets but Mohammedan coach Minhazul Abedin believed that it is their turn to smile this time.

"I believe this is the perfect time

for my team to turn around after the last defeat to BKSP. If you take our players' habits into consideration, you must expect that they do something on Thursday because they always bounce back after a bad performance," the Mohammedan coach said wearing a smiling face.

The former national captain also said that he has a number of players in his side who can single-handedly script the match's fate.

Minhaz however said that the problem with his present lot of talented players is that they lack intensity, pressure and the urge to deliver -- something that has been synonymous to a Abahani-Mohammedan clash.

"The main problem is that my top-order batsmen are not scoring runs simply because they lack of responsibility in their batting. Players like (Mohammad) Ashraf, Aftab Ahmed and Zunaed Siddiqui have the ability to decide the fate of a match but unfortunately they hardly have any individual goal," observed Minhaz.

Despite Abahani's success against them this season, Minhaz was not ready to brand any team as favourites in today's encounter. His Abahani counterpart Aminul Islam however said that his side will

go into the match as the 'better team'.

"We are definitely the better side because we defeated them in the first round of the Premier League. I think Mohammedan is under huge pressure after their defeat to BKSP in the previous match," observed Aminul.

Like his former Mohammedan colleague, the ex-national skipper is also looking forward to his top-order to continue their winning run to retain the title.

"Batting is a real problem whether it is for the national team or the club. Nobody scores runs consistently. I am looking at my top-order batsmen in the crucial match," he said.

Mohammedan and Bangladesh captain Ashraf blamed his team's lack of confidence behind the stop-start performance but he hoped that his team would at least play for pride in the crunch match.

"My only expectation is that we play the match for pride because right now I am not looking at the table," said Ashraf who scored three runs in the previous game after a match-winning 70 in the opening game against Surjo Torun.

On the other hand Abahani

Bhajji banned for five ODIs

Cricket
REUTERS, Mumbai

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) banned off-spinner Harbhajan Singh for five one-day internationals on Wednesday for a slapping incident involving Shanthakumaran Sreesanth during a domestic Twenty20 league match last month.

A statement from the board said the disciplinary committee, which met on Wednesday, had decided to invoke Rule 3.2.1 of the BCCI regulations wherein the maximum punishment is 'a ban up to a maximum of five ODIs and/or three Test matches'.

"The committee accordingly decided to ban Mr. Harbhajan

Singh for five one-day internationals, starting today (May 14), and observed that any further instance of misconduct will invoke a life ban," the statement said.

The ban meant the 27-year-old off-spinner will miss the forthcoming tri-series in Bangladesh in June and the start of the Asia Cup in Pakistan.

On April 28, Harbhajan was banned for the remainder of the Indian Premier League (IPL) season after being found guilty of slapping by the match referee.

The three-man disciplinary committee, which included president Sharad Pawar, were acting on a report submitted on Tuesday by commissioner Sudhir Navavati after the board ordered an independent inquiry into the incident.

Pakistan to host India in January

AGENCIES, Karachi

The dates for Australia, India and Sri Lanka to tour Pakistan next year were announced after a meeting of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Tuesday.

"The Indian team will tour in January and February, 2009 to play three Tests, five one-day internationals and two twenty20 games. PCB chairman Nasim Ashraf said.

"We are trying to convince India to play two Twenty20 matches as this type of cricket is getting popularity world-wide and a final itinerary will be announced after mutual consent," said Ashraf.

"Sri Lanka will come in early April for a three-match one-day series while Cricket Australia has confirmed they will play five one-day internationals in Pakistan from April 23," Ashraf told reporters after the meeting.

Australia postponed a Test tour in March-April for security reasons



IPL WAS MISSING HIM: A euphoric Shoaib Akhtar (L) is the toast of his Kolkata teammates after he removed Delhi batsman Manoj Tiwary in their Indian Premier League encounter at the Eden Gardens on Tuesday.

Akhtar derails Delhi

Cricket
CRICINFO, undated

Shoaib Akhtar made a dramatic Indian Premier League debut, taking four wickets in a blistering new-ball spell to consign the Delhi Daredevils to their fourth straight defeat at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata on Tuesday.

In a match crucial to the scramble for a semifinal place, the Kolkata Knight Riders overcame a batting failure, posting only 133, thanks to Shoaib and an inspired fielding effort. They eventually vindicated captain Sourav Ganguly's decision to bat first, pulling off a 23-run win for their third successive triumph.

Kolkata went in to field defending a small total and needing a huge performance from their debutant. Shoaib had played only one match in the last five months but showed no sign of rust as he removed the

dangerous Virender Sehwag for a golden duck in the first over. There was a hint of outswinging and Sehwag's footwork-free waft edged the ball behind to Wriddhiman Saha.

The Eden Gardens crowd, quiet after Kolkata's poor batting performance, regained its voice. Gautam Gambhir, the tournament's leading run-scorer, lashed a couple of boundaries off Ishant Sharma before becoming Shoaib's second victim. A short and wide delivery was cut straight to David Hussey at point and Shoaib set off on his trademark arm-outstretched airplane celebration.

An inside-edge saved AB de Villiers on the first delivery off Shoaib's third over but de Villiers fell next ball as he top-edged a bouncer to square leg. Manoj Tiwary fell in the following ball, trapped lbw, and though Tillakaratne Dilshan prevented the hat-trick, Delhi were reeling at 32 for 4. Shoaib, playing after his five-year ban was suspended for one month, finished with outstanding figures of 3-0-11-4.

His passion seemed infectious; three overs later Ashok Dinda uprooted Shikhar Dhawan's off stump. Dilshan, though, was unflustered by the fall of wickets and kept going for his shots. As he raced along to 25 with the help of five boundaries, the required rate for the last nine overs was a gettable 7.5. However, his run out while trying to steal a quick single dealt Delhi a severe blow.

All the while the atmosphere kept getting noisier, with franchise owner Shah Rukh Khan acting as cheerleader and Kolkata's anthem 'korbo, lorbo, jitbo re' booming through the loudspeakers. Amit Mishra and Farveez Mahroof gave them some anxious moments with a fighting 34-run stand but a poor piece of running from Mahroof snuffed out Delhi's hopes -- after gloving a short ball to the leg side, he neither got between the throw and the stumps nor ran in a straight line towards the non-striker's end and was caught inches short. With