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Second practice match today

SPORTS REPORTER

After suffering a surprising five-wicket defeat in the first practice match on Tuesday, Bangladesh national team will look to set the records straight against Bangladesh A in the second day-night practice match at the Mirpur Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

For the second and final practice match ahead of the tri-series, the national side will feature Alok Kapali and Forhad Reza, while Mehrob Hossain and Dollar Mahmud, who played for the national side in the first match, will now play for the A team.

Ashraful has voiced concern over his fitness after he had to consult a doctor over his groin problem. It was learned that he had trouble running but hopefully he will play the second warm-up game.

Earlier, on Tuesday, Bangladesh batted first but were shot out for 194 in 47.5 overs with only Rokibul Hasan scoring 52 runs while Mehrob Hossain contributed with 31.

In reply, Bangladesh A cantered to victory scoring the required 195 runs in just 39.1 overs.

Discarded national wicketkeeper Dhiman Ghosh top scored with an unbeaten 71 while Nayeem Islam also remained not out on 39. Dollar claimed three wickets for 30 runs while vice-captain Mashrafe Bin

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STAR Sports

French Open Tennis Women's Semifinals
Live from 6:00pm

ESPN

SAFF Championship India v Pakistan
Live from 5:00pm
Sportscentre India Sports News
Live at 8:30pm

STAR Cricket

England v New Zealand Third Test, Day 1
Live from 4:00pm



Jose Mourinho

(Inter Milan's newly-signed coach) "I think I'm a good coach, but I don't want to be special. I'm still me. I don't change, with the same passion for my work."



COACH KNOWS BEST: Bangladesh coach Jamie Siddons (R) imparts tips on the sweep shot to opener Tamim Iqbal during a net session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium indoor facilities in Mirpur yesterday.

Asif still in custody

PCB denies rumours of release

Cricket

AGENCIES, undated

Mohammad Asif is likely to remain in detention in Dubai for another three to four days, a Pakistan board official has said, quashing widespread speculation that he had been released or had charges against him dropped.

Asif has been detained at Dubai International Airport since Sunday after an allegedly contraband substance was found in his wallet. Since then, the PCB has appointed legal counsel for him and sent a senior board official to Dubai to handle the case.

Discussions took place between Asif's lawyer and prosecutors yesterday, though with no immediate resolution. A PCB official told Cricinfo that results from an Urine Test authorities carried out on Asif are still awaited, as are the results of a Test on the substance itself. The fact that it has taken them so long to get results is in itself a concern, the official said.

Further complicating the mat-

ter is the fact that there has been a death in the UAE's royal family, which generally means that the various states will observe a period of mourning now over the next few days and that public offices may remain closed.

Several TV channels and newspapers reported today that charges against Asif had been dropped. Dawn newspaper reported the Pakistani ambassador to the UAE as saying that and that Asif was due to head back to Pakistan on the first available flight.

According to a PTI report, an official of the Pakistan consulate in Dubai told the Indian news agency that the local authorities had not framed any charges against the fast bowler and he expected Asif to be back home soon. The Dubai customs officials informed that Asif was caught with 0.24gm of an illegal substance in his wallet and the substance was sent for laboratory tests.

Pakistan's ambassador to the UAE Ahsan Ullah Khan was quoted as saying that Asif's detention was a result of a misunderstanding and charges of possessing contraband drugs against the pacer have been

dropped. Pakistan's 'Dawn' newspaper quoted Khan as claiming that a misunderstanding led to Asif's detention but that has been sorted out.

Asif's lawyers were in constant touch with the Dubai prosecution office and the Pakistani missions in Abu Dhabi and Dubai provided all the required helps to the player, Khansaid.

But a board official confirmed that such reports were false and that the no charges have even been laid on the 25-year-old.

"These are incorrect as far as we know," a PCB official told Cricinfo.

"The charges haven't even been laid against him so far. As far as we know of the process, the airport prosecutor lays the charges down and passes on to the public prosecutor who will then decide whether or not this should go to trial. That process, we have been told, can take three to four days. But we are concerned that they have not come back still with results of the urine test, which they carried out on Sunday and the tests on the substance."

Asif, who has appeared in 11 Tests

SEE PAGE 18 COL 3

Sohail takes Asif's place

Pakistan arrive tomorrow

SPORTS REPORTER

Paceman Mohammad Asif has been dropped from the Pakistan squad for the triangular one-day series in Bangladesh after he remained in custody at Dubai airport following his detention for the possession of illegal drugs.

Pakistan arrive in Dhaka tomorrow to take part in the tri-series.

A Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) spokesman told reporters on Wednesday that young fast bowler Sohail Khan would take Asif's place, two days before the squad leaves for Bangladesh to play in the series that also involves India.

"Logistically it is difficult to send Asif to Bangladesh now as his visa is not ready and we don't know when he will be home," the spokesman said.

"The selectors have decided to send Sohail Khan instead."

Khan made his debut against Zimbabwe earlier this year and has played in three one-day internationals.

Asif, who has appeared in 11 Tests

SEE PAGE 18 COL 3

Bhutan hold Bangladesh

SPORTS REPORTER



SAFF CHAMPIONSHIP Maldives-Sri Lanka-2008

Bangladesh kicked off their fifth SAFF Championship campaign dourly when the 2003 champions were held to a 1-1 draw by minnows Bhutan yesterday.

Although 2005 SAFF runners-up Bangladesh's chances to regain the trophy looked remote when they left for Sri Lanka last month, everyone had taken a victory for granted against Bhutan, who lost all their previous six matches in 2003 and 2005 SAFF Championships.

Despite the threat of heavy rains of an early monsoon, which has created massive flood and landslide in Sri Lanka, killing at least 17 people and forcing over 2.5-lakh people to leave their homes, the match began on schedule at the Sugathadasa Stadium, which had

its pitch waterlogged on Tuesday.

Bangladesh went ahead after 26 minutes through defender-turned midfielder Arup Baidya's maiden international goal following a solo effort but Abu Yusuf's side conceded the stunning equaliser in the 79th minute.

It was Nima Sanghe who scored Bhutan's second ever goal against Bangladesh after losing all five earlier matches, 3-0 in the 2005 SAFF in Karachi, 3-0 in the 2003 SAFF in Dhaka, 3-1 in a friendly in Dhaka in 2001, 3-0 in the 1987 SAFF Games in Kolkata and 2-0 in the Kathmandu SAF Games in 1984.

Meanwhile, co-hosts Maldives got off to a perfect start when they crushed Pakistan 3-0 on Tuesday night in Male. Mohamed Shifan put the home side ahead in the dying minutes of first half and ace striker Ahmed Thoniq's header early in the second half doubled the lead. An own goal by Pakistan defender Naveed Akram in the final seconds of the game sealed the victory for Maldives.

Only Serbs and Russians



AP, Paris

Twice on the verge of elimination, Dina Safina instead advanced to the French Open semifinals on Wednesday.

Safina came within a point of losing for the second consecutive match, then rallied to beat fellow Russian Elena Dementieva 4-6, 7-6, 6-0. The semifinal berth is the first in a major tournament for the younger sister of two-time Grand Slam champion Maria Sharapova.

"I was one step away from losing," Safina said, "so I'll be especially glad to be back tomorrow."

Her latest comeback was remarkably similar to the one she mounted against top-ranked Maria Sharapova in the fourth round. The No. 13-seeded Safina trailed

Dementieva 5-2 in the second set and faced a match point in the next game, but Dementieva dumped a return into the net. That triggered a sudden reversal, and Safina lost only one game the rest of the way.

Against Sharapova, Safina also lost the first set, trailed 5-2 in the second and faced a match point in the next game.

Her opponent Thursday will be another Russian, 2004 US Open champion Svetlana Kuznetsova, who recovered from her own slow start to beat unseeded Kaia Kanepi 7-5, 6-2. Kuznetsova was runner-up at Roland Garros to Justine Henin in 2005.

The other semifinal will be all-Serbian, with No. 2-seeded Ana Ivanovic playing No. 3 Jelena Jankovic. Ivanovic beat Patty Schnyder 6-3, 6-2 Tuesday, and Jankovic defeated unseeded Carla Suarez Navarro by the same score. The big-hitting Safina changed

AGA KHAN GOLD CUP BFF to prepare budget

SPORTS REPORTER

The chance of reviving the prestigious Aga Khan Gold Cup after 26 years will depend on the football tournament's family patron Prince Karim Aga Khan.

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has agreed to prepare a draft budget for the event within a week and send it to Aga Khan in Paris where the final decision will be taken, informed BFF president Kazi Salahuddin last night.

Salahuddin, BFF vice-presidents Badal Roy, Shawkat Ali Khan Jahangir, Kazi Nabil Ahmed and member Harunur Rashid had a meeting with representatives of the 'His Highness Prince Aga Khan Shia Islamic Council for Bangladesh' yesterday where details about reintroducing the once popular event into the domestic calendar was discussed.

The Aga Khan Council's three-member delegation was led by its president Habib Hijeje.

Following the meeting at the BFF Bhaban, Salahuddin told that

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Windies win a draw

Cricket

AFP, St. John's

Australia had to settle for a draw, after Ramnaresh Sarwan hit his 11th Test hundred and with compatriot Shivnarine Chanderpaul batted West Indies to safety in the second Test here on Monday.

Sarwan hit the top score of 128 and Chanderpaul gave admirable support with an unbeaten 77 to be the rocks upon which West Indies built their second innings total of 266 for five before the two sides decided it was pointless to continue about 30 minutes after the scheduled close with five overs remaining.

The result means Australia retain their hold on the Frank Worrell Trophy -- symbol of Test supremacy against West Indies -- and have not lost a Test series in the Caribbean since 1991.

They lead the three-Test series

1-0, after they completed a 95-run victory in the opening Test at Sabina Park in Kingston, Jamaica.

The third and final Test between the two sides starts on June 12 at Kensington Oval in Barbados.

The Australians had set West Indies 372 for victory, after deciding to declare their second innings at their overnight total of 244 for six.

When they reduced West Indies to 84 for three, the odds of a victory were highly in their favour, when Chanderpaul emerged from the pavilion about half-an-hour before lunch.

But Australia, gaining little or no assistance from the hard, docile pitch, endured a frustrating afternoon, as they could find no way through either Sarwan or Chanderpaul, and the pair spent four hours together to add a match-saving 143 for the fourth wicket.

Sarwan, leading West Indies in the Test in place of the wounded Chris Gayle, reached his milestone

from the penultimate ball before the tea break, when he swept his 181st delivery from Stuart MacGill, playing in his final Test for Australia, through square leg for his 14th boundary.

Chanderpaul reached his half-century a short time later, when he cut MacGill through square cover for two and looked set to complete his second hundred of the match before the wickets of Sarwan and then Dwayne Bravo checked his progress. He still earned the Man-of-the-Match award.

The Aussies came close to making the breakthrough, when MacGill flummoxed Sarwan on 88 with a well-flighted leg-break, and the batsman appeared to have been stumped.

But a referral to video umpire Norman Malcolm was too close to call and the batsman was given a reprieve to allow West Indies to reach 161 for three at tea.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 2

Olympics in a 'Bird's Nest'

REZAUL KARIM back from China



When the world's best athletes march into Beijing's National Stadium for the 2008 Olympic Games, they will be entering a masterpiece of technology. It's also pretty crazy looking.

In short, it's stunning -- a massive conglomeration of uniquely shaped pieces of steel blended with modern-day ingenuity to deliver possibly the most amazing-looking sports stadium in the world.

The recently completed National Stadium in Beijing is set to be the focal point of the 2008 Games in August. Already its space-age design has earned it the nickname 'bird's nest'.

And in about 10 weeks' time, the greatest athletes in the world will march into the stadium under the gaze of 100,000 spectators as well as millions of television viewers around the globe.

Officials said the Beijing Olympics are expected to attract some four billion audiences across the globe via TV, newspapers, radio and the internet.

Generally a bird's nest reminds people of delicacy, safety and comfort and that's exactly what this stadium is meant to achieve.

Just two-week back, China Athletics Open was held at the stadium to give it a "test drive" under real conditions before the Games. There were even cheer squads in the stands to liven up the atmosphere.

"Hopefully the audience, both in and out of the stadium, will experience the best audio and video effects ever," Li Zhan Jun, Director General of Olympic Media Centre told a reporters delegation from SAARC countries on a trip to inspect the venue. Panasonic Corp will provide most of the display screens and acoustic equipment for the Games.

But it was no easy job, he said, due to the complex grid formation and the twig-like structural design. The large steel skeleton of the "bird's nest" weighs about 42,000 tonnes, the equivalent of 2,000 train compartments. Laid out in a straight line, it would measure about 36 kilometers. The steel-truss units, each of which is hollow and unique in shape, form dozens of different shapes on the exterior walls of the stadium.

Some 21 print and electronic

media journalists from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka visited China, including Olympic Venues in Beijing and Shanghai at the invitation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China from May 19-31.

"For me, the stadium is just like a three-dimensional maze," says Xu Baokui, a member of the cheer squad during the China Athletics Open.

After going into the stadium through one of the differently shaped entrances, visitors could be excused for thinking the inside looks like any other stadium at first glance. But the technology behind what is inside is somewhat different... very different.

Officials said the two huge light-emitting diode (LED) screens at either end of the stadium -- each 152 square metres in size -- will be the biggest screens used in Olympic stadium history. The screens used at the 2004 Athens Olympics were each about 120 square metres.

The complex steel-truss structure of the "bird's nest" made it difficult to hang the screens in such a way that they are visible to everyone in any of the 91,000 seats, including 80,000 permanent and

11,000 temporary seats.

The screens display pictures about 33 per cent lighter than ordinary LED screens making them clear to view during the daytime, even under direct sunshine.

The designers and builders also had to draw on their ingenuity to achieve the best acoustic effects in the stadium. The steel-truss, twig-like structure may be nice to look at, but it also serves to increase the echo level.

To reduce this to a minimum, designers applied a layer of special material to each steel girder so that the sound produced by loudspeakers would not create a disturbance, officials say.

The competition surface of the stadium is covered with specially made turf with each individual unit placed just 0.5 centimetres from the next giving the impression the surface is one complete block.

Looking upward, a web of cables has been put in position for performance and background use.

At present, most illumination equipment in the stadium is undergoing sustained testing day and night, while a slew of solar-powered lamps have already been installed along the walkways outside the stadium.

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A bird's eye view of the Beijing's new National Stadium for the 2008 Olympic Games.