



Did U Know?

The first-ever FA Cup final was played in 1872 at Kennington Oval when Wanderers beat Royal Engineers 1-0.



Michael Atherton
(Former England cricket captain)

"Cricket in the West Indies is in terminal decline. The standard of regional cricket played there recently was described by seasoned commentators as the worst in living memory."



ESPN
English Premier League
Everton v Aston Villa
Live from 9:55pm

STAR Sports
English Premier League
West Bromwich v Portsmouth
Live from 8:55pm

Primera Liga
Real Madrid v Sevilla
Live from 2:00am (Monday)

Security upped for Dhoni

PTI, Ranchi

Mahendra Singh Dhoni will get enhanced security cover with Jharkhand Chief Minister Shibu Soren directing the police to ensure that armed men, if required commandos, were deployed to guard the high-profile Indian cricket captain.

"The Chief Minister yesterday [Friday] asked the Director General of Police VD Ram, to review Dhoni's security, and replace security personnel with another team of armed men. If required, provide him with commandos," CM's Press Secretary Safiq Ansari told PTI on Saturday.

Soren's directive came after Dhoni went to the Birsamunda airport here on December 4 last without any "armed men" to board a flight to Chennai to participate in the selection committee meeting.

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Mukti, Diganta win

STAFF REPORTER, Rajshahi

Mukti Sangha defeated Town Club by four wickets in the Premier Division Cricket League at the Rajshahi Stadium yesterday.

Mukta claimed three wickets for 30 runs as Town Club were bundled out for 113 runs in 46.3 overs. Rajib made team highest 39.

In reply, Mukti made 117 runs for six wickets in 31.3 overs with Bappi making 33 runs.

In the day's other match, Diganta Prasari Sangha managed a 15-run victory against Mahabagan Club at the Women's Sports Complex ground.

Rabbi hit 42 and Sumon contributed as Diganta scored 230 for 8 in 50 overs.

In reply Nantu made 56 but it was not good enough for Mahabagan as they were all out for 215 runs in 49.4 overs.

Sagar took three wickets for 25 runs.

Eng decide on tour today

PTI, New Delhi

A final verdict on the fate of the two-match Test series between England and India, under a cloud of uncertainty following the terror attacks in Mumbai, is expected to come out today when the England and Wales Cricket Board's security expert gives his report on the security scenario.

The much-anticipated report will determine whether the England team, which is currently training in Abu Dhabi, will proceed to India to resume cricketing activities after the one-day series was scrapped in the wake of the Mumbai carnage.

ECB's security adviser Reg Dickason has already inspected the stadium and hotel in Chennai, the venue of the first Test scheduled from December 11, and had detailed discussions on the security arrangements with the Board of Control for Cricket in India and police officials.

ECB's managing director Hugh Morris and England Professional Cricketers' Association (EPCA) chief executive Sean Morris have also reached Chennai to inspect the arrangements before taking a final decision on the tour.

During the day, the ECB delegation had more discussions with BCCI and police officials who have promised

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Brothers Union's two-goal star Zahid Hossain evades a sliding tackle from a Rahmatganj defender during their B. League clash at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

BU ride on Zahid

SPORTS REPORTER



Zahid Hossain slammed two goals in the space of two minutes as Brothers Union went home happy with a 2-1 victory against giant-killers Rahmatganj in the last Citycell B. League

match before the Eid break at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

After a barren first half Zahid broke the deadlock in the 60th minute and converted a spot kick two minutes later. Nigerian Francis pulled back a consolation goal in the injury time.

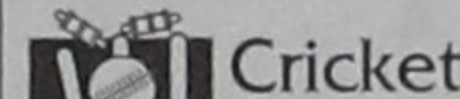
The victory helped the Gopibagh outfit to leapfrog Chittagong Mohammedan in the points table as they improved their tally to 16 points from nine matches to snatch the number four position.

POINTS TABLE

Teams	M	W	D	L	GF	GA	Pts
Abahani	10	7	1	2	19	6	22
Russel	9	5	2	2	16	9	17
Mohammedan	9	4	4	1	18	7	16
Brothers	9	4	4	1	14	9	16
Cig MSC	9	3	5	1	7	5	14
Rahmatganj	9	4	1	4	9	9	13
Farashganj	9	3	3	3	9	8	12
Cig Abahani	9	2	4	3	4	7	10
Arambagh	9	2	3	4	9	10	9
Muktijoddha	9	1	1	7	4	21	4
Khulna Abahani	9	1	0	8	6	24	3

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Jewel-Mushtaque match on Victory Day



SPORTS REPORTER

Shaheed Jewel XI will look to avenge last year's defeat at the hands of Shaheed Mushtaque XI in the traditional Victory Day match on December 26.

To be held at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium, the only novelty match in the domestic calendar will feature upcoming players, seasoned performers and a fallen star.

Former Bangladesh batsman Mehrib Hossain, who last played for the Tigers in 2003, will lead the Shaheed Jewel side that lost last year's encounter by a whopping 94 runs. Shaheed Mushtaque XI will have continuity at the top with skipper Rashedul Haque.

Classy right-hander Mehrib, who captained Sonargaon Cricketers in last season's Premier League, will lead a youthful side that has three young guns from BKSP--Mashrur Rahman, Mominul Haque and Latiful Azam. But the side is mostly made up of performers from last season's First Division League.

On the other hand, Rashedul has the likes of Ashiqul Islam, the under-19

wicketkeeper, allrounders Rasel Al Mamun and Nizamuddin Ripon and

batsman Suvagata Chowdhury, who played a pivotal role in the rise of CCS to the Premier League.

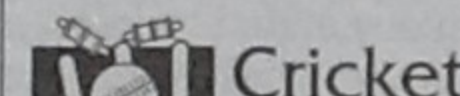
The selected players are requested to contact their respective team coaches on Sunday, December 14.

TEAMS

Shaheed Jewel XI: Mehrib Hossain (captain), Habibur Rahman, Mashrur Rahman, Sanjay Chakraborty, Mehedi Hassan, Mohammad Rahi, Mominul Haque, Saif

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Dizzy fears for Test



CRICINFO, undated

The former Australia fast bowler, Jason Gillespie, has issued a stinging attack on Cricket Australia (CA) for its treatment of him and accused the board of ingratiating itself with the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI).

Gillespie's association with the unsanctioned Indian Cricket League (ICL) effectively led to his banishment from first-class cricket. And although he is in the autumn of his career, he nevertheless feels his international career has consequently been unfairly curtailed by CA's position on the status of ICL players.

"For guys like myself and [fellow ICL players] Jimmy Maher and Michael Kasprowicz, our time playing international cricket has gone by, but some of us would like to still represent our states," Gillespie told Adelaide's Sunday Mail.

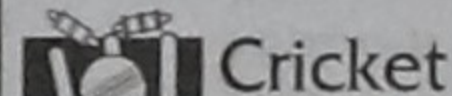
"It's quite sad. The ICL isn't wanting to take guys out of state cricket and Test cricket. In our contracts it clearly states that if you are asked by your state or country to play that form of cricket, ICL will not stand in your way."

"The problem is the BCCI has come out and said they're upset and won't allow it. He [Lalit Modi, the IPL chairman] said the IPL would not affect the future tours programme, but clearly it has."

Unlike the IPL, the ICL is not officially recognised by the ICC. Subsequently, certain boards banished players from representing their domestic teams, and the boards' apparent kowtowing

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Watch out for Smith



AFP, Johannesburg

Australia will encounter a changed Graeme Smith when the South African cricket team arrives in Perth Sunday.

Smith was a relatively inexperienced captain when the South Africans toured Australia three years ago.

But it didn't stop him making some strong statements, especially when he suggested that Ricky Ponting's authority as captain was being undermined by the frustrated ambitions of Shane Warne.

Smith proclaimed that the South Africans were confident that they could mount a serious challenge against the world champions, but his side were beaten 2-0 in the three-match series and Smith failed as an opening batsman, with a highest score of 39.

After the tour, Smith said he had been deliberately provocative because he wanted to deflect media attention away from other members of what was largely an inexperienced

side.

As a tactic, it backfired spectacularly.

Three years on, the South Africans are again confident but this time they have more reason for optimism.

Smith himself is unlikely to make any big claims other than the obvious statement that his team have played impressive Test cricket over the past year and a half.

Eight of their most recent nine series have been won, with the exception a drawn series in India earlier this year. They are second on the International Cricket Council's Test rankings behind Australia.

The keys to South Africa's success have been a solid, settled top six batting order and lively pace bowling spearheaded by Dale Steyn, the ICC's Test player-of-the-year.

The batting has been especially impressive despite an unusually poor run of form by star batsman Jacques Kallis.

Five of the top six made centuries when South Africa won a series in England earlier this year -- their first win there

in the post-apartheid era. The exception was Kallis.

One of the most important selection decisions was the recall of Neil McKenzie as an opening batsman when the inconsistency of the richly-talented Herschelle Gibbs became too much of a burden for his teammates.

McKenzie, 33, added maturity and a sensible dressing room presence to the team, while his opening partnership with Smith has been highly successful.

They put on a world record 415 against Bangladesh in Chittagong in March but more important was a match-saving effort of 204 in the first Test against England at Lord's which provided the foundation for South Africa to earn a draw after following on 346 runs behind.

Hashim Amla at number three is one of the most improved batsmen in world cricket, while Ashwell Prince and AB de Villiers have been consistent run-getters at numbers five and six.

Only Kallis has struggled of

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Mehedi Hasan wins rating chess

SPORTS REPORTER

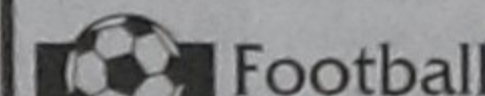
FIDE Master Mehedi Hasan Parag clinched the Prime Bank 11th Open International Rating Chess tournament after defeating FM Syed Mahfuzur Rahman in the final round at the federation hall-room yesterday.

The win gave him eight points, 0.5 clear of runner-up Sohel Chowdhury, who snuck into the second position after defeating FM Abu Sufian Shakil, who disappointingly finished at sixth point after the third position had seven players at seven points. A tie-breaker was used to split up the positions.

Former foreign secretary Muhammad Zamir was present as chief guest and distributed prizes among the winners.

Prime Bank managing director M Ehsanul Haque was also present on the occasion.

Diego conquers Kolkata



INTERNET, undated

Diego Maradona came, saw and conquered a city that poured out in multitudes to see and honour him. Thousands of soccer-crazy fans thronged Maheshala, in the southern fringes of the city, to watch the Argentinian legend lay the foundation stone of the Indian Football School. The 48-year-old newly appointed coach of Argentina was accompanied by his girlfriend Veronica.

Clad in denims, Maradona seemed in high spirits, as he clapped, threw flying kisses and waved at the crowd, who waited anxiously for 40 minutes as the soccer great was late in leaving the hotel for the venue.

He was flown in from the hotel in a chopper to a helipad a few kilometers from the venue at Batanagar and then was carried in a specially designed bus, with large fibre-glass windows, to enable people to have a glimpse of their "god" and for Maradona to see this packed and pulsating city which he is visiting for the first time.

Maradona spent 30 minutes at the complex, which houses the academy. The complex is also named after Maradona.

One hundred children displayed ball juggling skills and sang songs to welcome the football genius, who passionately reached out to his fans by coming down the dais and shaking hands with some of them.

"If football is religion, then you are its God," the band sang in praise of him.

Seemingly to enjoy every minute of the festive spirit, Maradona unveiled the foundation stone with a press of a button and then touched it,

much to the joy of the large number of lensmen.

"Best wishes. India is far off from my country. But I had no idea I have so many fans here," Maradona said in a brief speech towards the end of the programme.

"I had no idea that such beautiful football is played here, people love football so much. Long live India," said Maradona, as the crowd lapped up every word of the man who led his nation to World Cup glory in 1986.

Maradona was showered with gifts -- small silver replica of the Taj Mahal, a sketch of his idol Che Guevara were among the presents handed over to him. Teenage artist Rajashee Chatterjee presented him Che's portrait and a joyous Maradona embraced the young boy.

"I come from a country which is close to Fidel Castro and Che Guevara," said Maradona, famous for his 'Hand of the God' goal against England in the 1986 World Cup.

He also gave an imprint of his famous left foot, which will be preserved. He kicked a ball, and mingled with the crowd for a few minutes before leaving the venue.

Maradona's presence left the crowd in awe. "This was a lifetime opportunity for me to see Maradona. He is the world's best footballer," Shankar Maitro, a local, said.

A septuagenarian who came with his grandson to have a glimpse of the footballer, said: "I used to play football but left it long back in 1960, the year this little genius was born. I wanted to see him once in my life. I am happy that my wish is fulfilled today," he said.

An estimated 30,000 people thronged the airport at 1.15 a.m. to receive Maradona who appeared quite nonplussed yet pleased by the rousing midnight welcome.



Argentina legend Diego Armando Maradona (R) hugs a young artist who presented him with a portrait of Cuban revolutionary Che Guevara at the foundation ceremony for the Indian Football School at Kolkata on Saturday. Maradona has been a huge hit with the Kolkata droves with people turning up in their numbers to catch a glimpse of the present Argentina coach.

PHOTO: AFP