

New signings for Russel, Arambagh

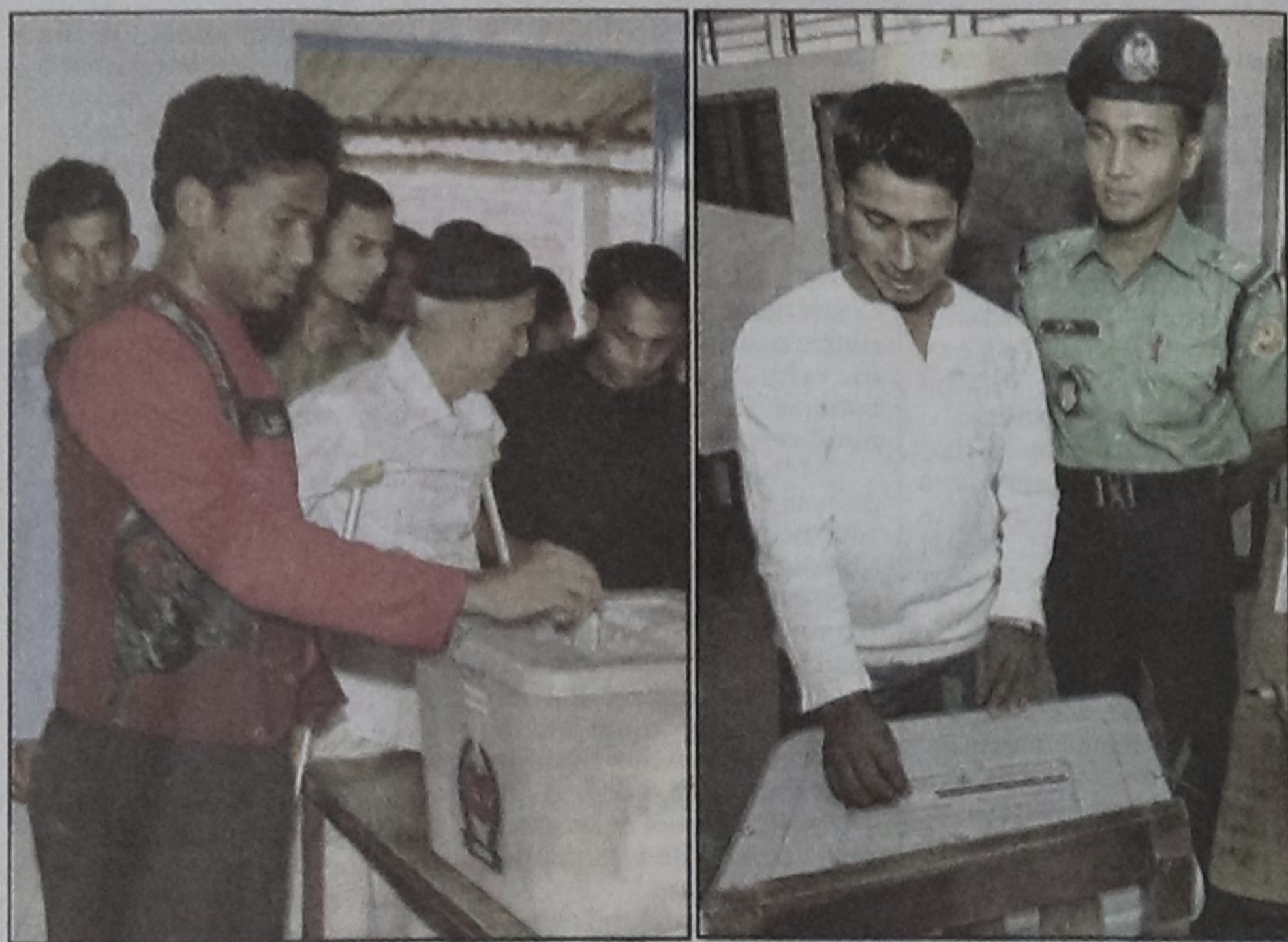
SPORTS REPORTER

Although Mohammedan have given up hope to sign new foreign players, B. League title contenders Sheikh Russel roped in a new batch of imports for the rest of the competition.

Russel, who are fourth in the 11-team table but only two points adrift of leaders and defending champions Abahani, have sent back their three Moroccan recruits Bourdip Mohamed, Igr Mohamed and captain Touati Youness for dissatisfactory performance.

The newcomers are three Moroccans -- striker Hamid Omeri, midfielders Ahmed Al Mojahid and Hisab Admi -- in

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Bangladesh cricket team captain Mohammad Ashraf (R) and star footballer Alfaz Ahmed are casting their votes at different city centres during the national elections yesterday.

PHOTOS: STAR

Focus back on cricket

SPORTS REPORTER



The voting for the general election, the proceedings of the first Test between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka resume today at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur after a rest day.

The cricketers, except a few who exercised their voting rights for the first time, stayed in the hotel as it was a rare rest day during the Test, on account of the election.

"It's for the first time I have cast my vote. I went to the polling booth after completion of the swimming session in the morning. The atmosphere was fantastic as it has really taken a festive mood," said Bangladesh captain Mohammad Ashraf.

Mehrab Hossain and Mahbul Alam also cast their votes in the capital but the others, who are voters of constituencies out of Dhaka, missed the chance.

The people will definitely go through the election fever for a few more days but there was no time for the players to think anything other

than cricket.

After the third day's play on Sunday, Sri Lanka were in a commanding position to continue the winning run against the Tigers as Mahela Jayawardene led from the front with an unbeaten 129 to ensure a 406-run overall lead with six wickets in hand.

Sri Lanka finished the third day with 291-4 after Bangladesh were bundled out for 178 in reply to the visitors' 293 in the first innings.

When play resumes, the curiosity would be about the time of declaration due to the threat of dense fog as foggy conditions have already killed much time of the match.

Ashraf, however, was also looking forward to the declaration and the whole team's focus is now on the second innings batting.

"I think there is no scope for us to think about the result at this point of the match. We are looking forward to Sri Lanka's declaration because fog could be a factor," said Ashraf.

"Our focus would be on batting as long as we can. We are not in a position to think about result. It would be even a hard task for us to

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Mendis lands in Dhaka

SPORTS REPORTER

Fit-again spinner Ajantha Mendis arrived in Dhaka yesterday to join the touring Sri Lanka to play the second Test and the tri-nation one-day tournament.

The mystery off-spinner missed the ongoing first Test after injuring his ankle while bowling for Army SC in his first match of the domestic season against Tamil Union.

Initially it was told that he would miss the two-match Test series, a reason why left-arm spinner Rangana Herath had been included in the squad as replacement but Mendis recovered quickly to be available for the rest of the series.

The second and final Test will be held from January 3-7 at the Chittagong Divisional Stadium while the tri-nation kicks off with the match between Bangladesh and Zimbabwe on January 10 at the Sher-e-Bangla Stadium in Mirpur.

"My ankle is alright now and I am not feeling any pain," Mendis told reporters on his arrival.

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Sri Lanka's sensational off-spinner Ajanta Mendis (R) enters the Sheraton Hotel yesterday. The young twerker missed the ongoing first Test due to ankle injury but is likely to be available for the second Test starting at Chittagong on January 3.

PHOTO: STAR

BFF to go grassroots in '09

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) is looking to have a busy 2009 in a bid to keep football running round the year.

Not only tournaments, the football's governing body is eyeing to introduce a development project for ten-year olds among other youth programmes.

BFF's newly appointed technical director Shahidur Rahman Shantoo, the former national goalkeeper who joined the federation this month, has already submitted a programme that will see launching leagues for under-10, 12, 14 and 16 players.

Shantoo admitted that he has prepared a programme. "Yes, I have submitted it to the development committee. But I will only talk about it when the BFF finalises this," said Shantoo, who learned his trade in coaching at youth level in the USA and also coached Bangladesh's 2004 SAF Games football squad.

BFF president Kazi Salahuddin, who played along side Shantoo in the national team, said that the programme is set to be launched by February 2009.

"I don't want to say much about this now but if we can't start it by the end of January, it will surely get underway in February," Salahuddin

told The Daily Star last night.

"We have held back some announcements for the general election but our plan is that football should be run for 12 months next year," said the BFF chief, who cast his vote at Gulshan Model School.

He assured that the Tk 4-crore budget would not be a problem.

"We have been negotiating with a few and hope that the everything would be finalised early in January."

Nokia has long been wanted to get involved in youth development programmes and it was confirmed that the leading cellular phone manufacturers, who twice sponsored the national football team, is one of the parties.

The programme, meanwhile, includes football leagues at all 64 districts from under-10 to 16 levels, which seems to be a very ambitious plan.

It was learned that the technical director has given more emphasis on competitive football than training. If the clubs cannot be involved, the technical directors will consider involving teams of different localities as well as schools.

The one challenge the BFF will face to make this success is the inactivity of the divisional and district FAs (football association) because without their involvement, it would be impossible to run the programme.

The FAs have yet to get assistance from the

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S Africa smell victory

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

South Africa need another 153 runs on the fifth and final day today at the MCG to overturn two decades of Australian dominance at home after Dale Steyn continued his heroics by earning 10 wickets for the game on the penultimate day of the second Test Monday.

Steyn, who took 5 for 87 and then scored 76 in the first innings, backed up with 5 for 67 and was responsible for ending Australia's tiny chance for a series-levelling victory.

Ricky Ponting's almost lone hand of 99 extended the small advantage to 182 and was the only bright spot, apart from Mitchell Johnson's unbeaten 43, on another horrible day for the home side. Australia have not lost a series in their backyard since West Indies toppled them in 1992-93, but if the predicted rain stays away on Tuesday South Africa can dethrone the world champions.

Once Australia were dismissed for 247, South Africa had to negotiate six overs before stumps and Graeme Smith did it easily while reducing the target by 30. Smith off-drove Brett Lee's first offering for four and hit another four boundaries in his 25 from 19, while Neil McKenzie, who was bowled by a Lee no-ball, made it through with 3.

While Steyn led the charge through a self-destructive batting line-up, Ponting tried to hold things together with his second outstanding display of the game. However, he was becalmed in the 90s and spent 40 minutes there before chipping a catch to Smith at cover off Morne Morkel. He left with a straight face, most supporters at the ground were disappointed, and the South Africans knew they were nearly there.

After allowing the visitors a sensational comeback on the third day, Australia suffered an awful start when their first three batsmen departed before they had erased the 65-run deficit. Steyn captured Matthew Hayden and Simon Katich in two overs in the morning and then returned to knock over Michael Clarke and Andrew Symonds in six balls to limit the recovery. He bowled in short spells but each time he returned the batsmen were uncomfortable and his haul, which was completed when Peter Siddle edged to Mark Boucher, pushed him to 74 wickets for the year.

Ponting is the only great in Australia's team playing like one and he did his best to keep the side in with a hope of setting a threatening victory target. However, with his partners exiting to rash shots on a firm pitch, Ponting was battling two teams. He did the best for his outfit and was unfortunate to miss becoming the only person to score twin centuries four times.

At lunch Ponting had no boundaries in 32, but he picked up seven in the second session as he drove and pulled superbly. There were plays and misses and crisp straight fours in the same over as Ponting carried on his fine form after 101 on the opening day. After tea he was more subdued as the task turned to batting for time while slowly expanding the lead. The lack of freedom and a tighter field eventually cost him.

Ponting had taken the side ahead 35 minutes before lunch and was the most comfortable by far of a struggling outfit. The picture was more promising for Australia during his bright 96-run combination with Clarke (29), but when it ended with Clarke's cut straight to McKenzie at cover there was more trouble.

Steyn struck again five balls later when Symonds edged for

a second time towards Jacques Kallis, who picked up a fine take at second slip. Australia were 5 for 145 and the lead was a meagre 80. Brad Haddin

could not restrain himself and flashed at a wide delivery from Makhaya Ntini on 10 in another example of poor

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Fiery South Africa paceman Dale Steyn took five wickets to put his on top against Australia after the fourth day's play of the second Test at the Melbourne Cricket Ground yesterday.

PHOTO: FILE

LIVERPOOL TAKE SOLO LEAD

Chelsea held in derby

AFP, London



Liverpool captain Steven Gerrard scored twice as the Merseysiders ended 2008 on top of the Premier League with a 5-1 win away to Newcastle at St James' Park in Sunday's early kick-off match.

And their day got better when second-placed Chelsea were held to a dramatic 2-2 draw by Fulham, in the west London derby later on, to leave Liverpool with a three-point lead.

Former Arsenal captain Tony Adams saw the Gunners leave his Portsmouth side just three points above the relegation zone with a 1-0 win at the Emirates.

Everton won 3-0 at home to Sunderland as Ricky Sbragia's first match since being confirmed as the Black Cats full-time manager in succession to Roy Keane ended in defeat.

West Ham fought back to beat 10-man Stoke 2-1 - the losers also had Ricardo Fuller sent-off for a slap on his own captain Andy Griffin.

Robinho rescued a point deep into stoppage-time for Manchester City away to Blackburn Rovers as manager Mark Hughes's club, 2-0 down with six minutes to play, drew 2-2 against his old one in a dramatic late kick-off.

One consolation for Rovers was that the point they earned took them off the bottom after West Brom had beaten 10-man Tottenham 2-0.

Wigan won 1-0 away to Bolton thanks to Egypt striker Amir Zaki's penalty.

Reigning champions Manchester United, third with three games in hand, face Middlesbrough at Old Trafford on Monday while Aston Villa can regain fourth place from Arsenal away to Hull on Tuesday.

Gerrard opened the scoring just after the half-hour mark. Five minutes later Sami Hyypia's header made it 2-0.

But slack marking by Liverpool saw Newcastle, who before kick-off found out that

owner Mike Ashley had reversed his decision to sell the club, pull a goal back on the stroke of half-time when a corner was headed in by David Edgar.

Ryan Babel made it 3-1 to Liverpool five minutes into the second-half and Gerrard made sure of the points with a cool finish in the 66th minute.

Xabi Alonso added a fifth from the penalty spot after Edgar's foul on David N'Gog.

"You haven't seen the best of Liverpool yet," said Sammy Lee, their assistant manager.

"You win nothing in December but you can certainly lose a lot."

Newcastle boss Joe Kinnear accepted that the best side had won.

"We had to play one of the best teams I've seen for a long while."

United States international Clint Dempsey stunned Chelsea when he got on the

end of Simon Davies' 10th minute free-kick at Craven Cottage.

But five minutes into the second-half Frank Lampard equalised when he capitalised on a mix-up between Fulham keeper Mark Schwarzer and Aaron Hughes.

Lampard put Chelsea ahead when his 72nd minute free-kick deceived Schwarzer only for Dempsey to head in Fulham's second from a corner a minute from full-time.

Chelsea manager Luiz Felipe Scolari was critical of the poor defending from set-pieces which contributed to both Fulham goals.

"We have been very good with corner-kicks and free-kicks this season but not today," said the Brazilian.

"Before the game every player knows who to mark. It is my job now to look and see what happened. It is my dressing room."

Arsenal, who saw Pompey striker Peter Crouch hit the post with a first-half header, had to wait until nine minutes before full-time to break the deadlock when William Gallas, stripped of the captaincy earlier this season after criticising his teammates, seized on an error by England keeper David James.

"It was a big three points for us," said Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger.

Mikel Arteta put Everton in front with a 25-yard free-kick in the 10th minute at Goodison Park and the Spanish midfielder doubled the lead 17 minutes later with a deflected shot after another free-kick had been blocked.

Dan Gosling added a third seven minutes from time.

Goals from South Africa's Benni McCarthy and fellow striker Jason Roberts appeared to have sealed victory for Rovers.

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Did U Know?

Bangladesh all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan took five wickets in an innings for the fourth time in the first Test against Sri Lanka on Saturday.



What to Watch

BTV

Bangladesh v Sri Lanka

First Test, Day 4

Live from 9:30am

STAR Cricket

Australia v South Africa

Second Test, Day 5

Live from 5:30am

ESPN

Sportscentre India

Sports News

Live at 8:30pm

English Premier League

Hull City v Aston Villa

Live from 2:00am (Wednesday)

TALK TURKEY

Fabio Capello

(England soccer manager)

"It's a very long way to arrive at the level of Sir Alf Ramsey -- it is difficult and very, very long."

He does not yet deserve to be compared with Sir Alf Ramsey.

PCB tries to lessen loss

CRICINFO, undated

The Pakistan board is likely to replace the central contracts retainer structure for domestic regional teams as it looks to adjust to the financial impact of a year without any major cricket.

Regional teams such as Karachi and Lahore had a central contracts system in place during the recent seasons, though the monthly fees

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Manchester City forward Robinho (R) scores the equalising goal past the despairing dive of Blackburn goalkeeper Paul Robinson during their Premiership encounter at Ewood Park on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP