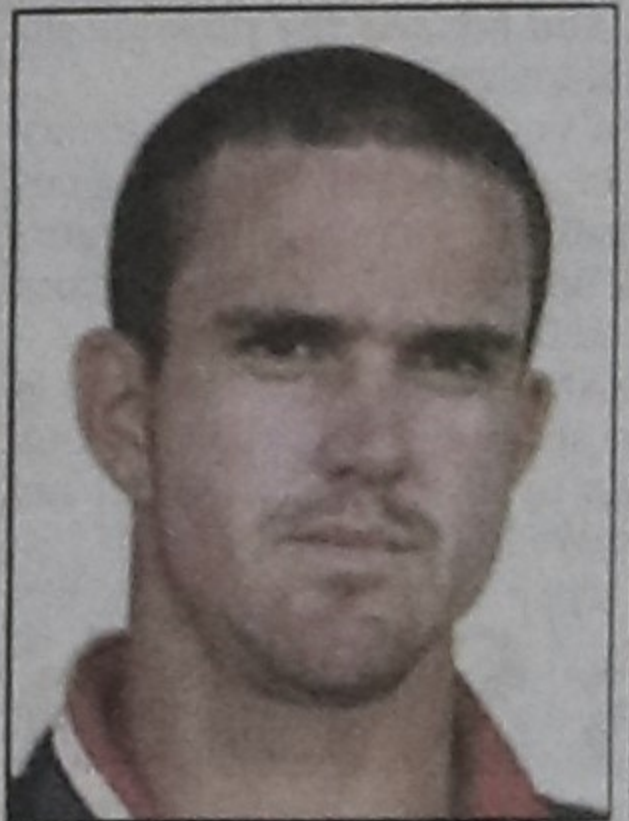




Did U Know?

Bank robber John Dillinger played professional baseball.



Kevin Pietersen
(England cricket superstar)
"I will not be without her for 11 weeks ever again, we've decided that."
On how much he missed his wife Jessica Taylor on the Caribbean tour.



TEN Sports
South Africa v Australia
First one-day international
Live from 6:30pm

ZEE Sports
West Indies v England
Fifth one-day international
Live from 9:00pm

NEO Cricket
New Zealand v India
Third Test, Day Two
Live from 4:00am (Saturday)

Nat'l handball starts Sunday

SPORTS REPORTER

The qualifying round of the Exim Bank 19th National Men's Handball Championship will begin on Sunday in Rangpur with the Zone A qualifiers.

The zones B and C qualifiers will start in Jessore and Rangamati on April 17 and April 28 respectively.

A record 29 teams will participate in the qualifiers for six spots in the finals where Bangladesh Rifles, Bangladesh Police, Bangladesh Ansar and Rajshahi will get direct entry. The 10-team final round will be played in Dhaka in May.

Bangladesh Handball Federation (BHF) officials revealed at a press conference yesterday that Exim Bank will provide Tk 12.50 lakh out of the total Tk 13-lakh budget.

BHF president Nurul Fazal Bulbul, vice-president Hamida Ali, general secretary Asaduzzaman Kohinor, Exim Bank's additional MD Ekramul Haque and others were present.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 4

Mashrafe off to IPL

SPORTS REPORTER

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza flew off to the whirlwind world of the Indian Premier League (IPL) last evening to officially put pen to paper for Kolkata Knight Riders franchise.

The Bangladesh vice-captain will first arrive in Kolkata and then go off to Mumbai to shoot a commercial for Pepsi to promote the upcoming Twenty20 World Championships in England. He will return to the West Bengal capital soon after and leave for South Africa with captain Sourav Ganguly and other players and team officials.

It is, however, not clear when exactly Mashrafe will sign for the Kolkata side, which has already left for Cape Town where they open their IPL campaign on April 19 against the Deccan Chargers.

The Narail Express has claimed that he is 'pretty much' in the fit list and is raring to go. "I am fit and just have to acclimatise myself with the team and then I cannot wait to have a go," said Mashrafe yesterday.

But the fast bowler is fully aware of what awaits him in South Africa. While the conditions have traditionally favoured fast bowling, the wickets would be heavily stacked in the batsmen's favour with the added advantage of short boundaries. But Mashrafe knows the conditions quite well after having toured the country only last year.

"In South African conditions I believe I can do well. It will be the beginning of winter there so I expect the ball to do a little under lights but

then again I think that the wickets are going to be batting-friendly.

"Because so much money is involved there is hardly a chance for them to prepare bowler-friendly wickets but as long as I can bowl the right line and length I should be doing well," said Mashrafe who added that he won't mull on previous difficulties in South Africa.

Mashrafe, who was bided in the auctions for six million dollars at Goa in February this year, will join the likes of Sourav Ganguly, Murali Karthik, Ajit Agarkar, Australian Brad Hodge and South African Charl Langeveldt in the KKR camp.

Other prominent international players like Ishant Sharma, Brendon McCullum, Chris Gayle, Ricky Ponting and David Hussey are currently on international duty with the national teams and are expected to join the camp at a later date.

"I think Chris (Gayle) will be in England while Ricky (Ponting) and David (Hussey) will be in UAE playing against Pakistan. Of course they are big players and very important too and yes they will be missed but we have good back up players and we are a pretty balanced side so it should not be a problem. The captain, coach and management would have everything planned accordingly so that their absence don't affect us," said Mashrafe who added that he is looking forward to a successful time in the competition despite the side having an ordinary first tournament.

"We are a good team and we know that all the

SEE PAGE 18 COL 2



SIX-LAKH DOLLAR MAN: Cricket superstar Mashrafe Bin Mortaza arrives at the Zia International Airport to leave for India yesterday. He left for Kolkata to play for the Shah Rukh Khan-owned Knight Riders in the upcoming Indian Premier League.

PHOTO: STAR

DAVIS CUP Hosts blank Turkmenistan

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh maintained their winning run in the Davis Cup Asia/Oceania Zone Group IV competition with a comfortable 3-0 win over Turkmenistan yesterday.

Although Bangladesh lost the doubles match in the opening round of Group B to Jordan, the local boys won both the singles and the doubles match in the second round at the National Tennis Complex in Ramna.

Shibu Lal gave Bangladesh a flying start beating Jamshidov Ilmuradov 6-1, 6-1 before Amol Roy ensured an unassailable 2-0 lead defeating Eziz Davletov.

In the afternoon, Shibu paired with Ranjan Ram to give Bangladesh their first doubles victory of the competition with a 6-1, 6-3 defeat of Central Asian duo Davletov and Bahtiyar Atabaev.

Jordan edged Myanmar 2-1 in Group B while United Arab Emirates defeated Bahrain by the same margin in Group A.

Bangladesh will rest while Bahrain play Yemen, UAE meet Iraq, Qatar face Jordan and Myanmar will take on Turkmenistan today.

U-13 trial on Apr 6

SPORTS REPORTER

The final trial for the national under-13 football team will take place at the Bishreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur on April 6.

The 31 players of the preliminary squad have been requested to report to coach Saiful Bari Titu at the venue at 4 pm on the day of trial.

A final goal will be selected for the AFC Under-13 Football Festival which will be held in Iran from May 17-23.

India to go for it Third and final Test from today

Cricket

AFP, Wellington

India have vowed to chase victory in the third and decisive cricket Test against New Zealand starting here Friday, rather than seal the series by seeking a draw.

India lead the series 1-0, and captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni is adamant his team will be trying for their 100th Test victory instead of a conservative draw that would ensure their first series victory in New Zealand since 1967-68.

"Once you have the mindset of going for the draw, you are not aggressive enough to win a Test match," Dhoni told reporters after India's final training session at the Basin Reserve ground.

"We will approach the game in the same way as the first or the second Test."

One down after the tourists took the first Test in Hamilton by 10 wickets, New Zealand -- who put up a massive 619 for nine declared in the drawn second Test -- have no choice but to take an aggressive approach.

"I think we realise that a 1-1 series would be a great result for us. And so any opportunity that

we can get to win the Test match, I think we have to take," captain Daniel Vettori told reporters.

He said going for the win was the only option, even if it increased the risk of suffering a second loss.

The big question is whether New Zealand can dismiss India's talent-laden batting line-up twice.

The bowlers caught India napping in the first innings on a batting paradise at Napier to dismiss them for 305, but India recovered in their follow-on, finishing on 476 for four to salvage a draw.

Vettori says New Zealand's best chance will be to bowl first and try to dismiss India relatively cheaply in their first innings.

But the Basin Reserve wicket is a bit of an unknown for the New Zealand captain.

"I've never seen a Basin pitch like this before," Vettori said. "I've not seen a Basin wicket as brown as this, or as dry."

While Dhoni is confident about tactics, he said he is still unsure whether he will play.

He was a late withdrawal from the second Test after suffering back spasms, and while his back now feels much better, no decision will be

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1



Bangladesh's Shibu Lal executes a backhand slice against Jamshid Ilmuradov (not in picture) of Turkmenistan during their Davis Cup Asia/Oceania Zone Group-IV match at Ramna yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Nat'l athletics sans top sprinters

SPORTS REPORTER

The UCB 34th National Athletics Championships will begin today at the Bangabandhu National Stadium but the premier domestic competition will miss a number of star athletes.

Reigning men's 100m champion Abu Abdullah and runner-up Shamsuddin will miss the championships as the two top sprinters of the country ran away from camp during a trip to Europe last month.

Abdullah, a Bangladesh Army sprinter, and Shamsuddin of Bangladesh Air Force, went to Greece to participate in the World Military Sports from March 12-18 but deserted the camp to seek better fortune like their predecessors.

Defecting camps during foreign trips is nothing new for Bangladesh but mostly the sprinters have done this in the past including country's 2006 South Asian Games (SAG) gold medalist Mahfuzur Rahman Mithu, the hurdler who absconded in Italy last year during a training programme.

About 500 athletes will compete in the two-day meet, which will be the last big event ahead of next year's SAG in Dhaka.

The number of judges would be 150, who will have to use manual equipment in absence of electronic timers for the 36 events including 14 for women.

Bangladesh Amateur Athletic Federation (BAAF) president Hayatuzzaman Khan informed at a press briefing at the NSC conference room that the federation's budget for the championships is Tk 12 lakh with sponsor United Commercial Bank providing Tk five lakh.

Khan added that the federation has also confirmed sponsors for the next national as well as next month's National Junior Championships.

State Minister for Youth and Sports Ahad Ali Sarkar will declare the meet open and the federation will hand over cash awards to four marathon runners -- Anisur Rahman, Golam Molla, Pesta Hossain and Firoz Khan -- who participated in the long-distant events in Nairobi, Mumbai, Singapore and Hong Kong. The Standard Chartered Bank has sent about 9,000 US dollars for the four runners.

BAAF general secretary Shah Alam informed that they have started a talent-hunting programme three months earlier while all the

SEE PAGE 18 COL 4

Bolivia 6 Argentina 1 Maradona falls from heaven

AFP, La Paz



Argentina coach Diego Maradona refused to blame the negative effects of competing at altitude after his side were humiliated 6-1 by Bolivia on Wednesday, thus registering their worst defeat in 60 years.

Bolivia's goals came from a Joaquin Botero hat-trick and Marcelo Martins, Alex Da Rosa and Didi Torrico while Argentina found the net through Luis Gonzalez at La Paz's high-altitude Hernando Siles stadium.

But the former World Cup winner, who thus suffered his first defeat since taking over as coach last year, refused to explain his faltering team's performance on playing at 3650 metres above sea level.

"No, the altitude was not an issue. We came up against a team that gave very little away and basically they were the better team," said Maradona.

"It seemed to me that Bolivia gave everything they had, they played well and showed us good football." That remark prompted applause from media representatives, appar-

ently for Maradona's sense of fair-play.

He added: "Whoever played against that Bolivian team would have suffered the same fate as us. I suffered with them (players). Every Bolivian goal was a dagger in my heart."

Argentinian keeper Juan Pablo Carrizo, who had a memorable night for the wrong reasons, was first beaten in the 12th minute by striker Marcelo Martins, who plays for Shakhtar Donetsk in the Ukraine.

However, the Argentinians, twice world champions, were level in the 25th minute when Porto's Luis Gonzalez hit a shot from 30-metres without much conviction but an unexpected bounce meant it went past Bolivia keeper Carlos Arias and into the net.

Bolivia went further ahead in the 34th minute through hat-trick hero Botero of Mexican club Correcaminos, Mexico.

An inspired and motivated Bolivia went 3-1 ahead just before the break through Da Rosa and then Botero got further goals in the 50th and 66th minutes. Torrico scored the sixth and final goal with three minutes to go.

Angel Di Maria was sent off in the 63rd minute to make a terrible night even worse.

Argentina's national press panned the team.

SEE PAGE 18 COL 1



CAN'T TAKE IT ANYMORE! Argentina coach Diego Maradona (L) scratches his forehead after seeing his side thrashed 6-1 by Bolivia in their World Cup qualifier while the winners' hat-trick star Joaquin Botero (R) goes on a celebration lap at the Hernando Siles Stadium in La Paz on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP