

India reach new heights

PTI, Dubai

India on Wednesday topped Australia to achieve their highest-ever ranking of second in the ICC ODI Championship table courtesy the series victory in New Zealand and the world champions' recent dip in form.

With 122 rating points in their kitty, Mahendra Singh Dhoni's men are just a point ahead of Australia, while South Africa sits pretty at the top with 127 points.

The Graeme Smith-led side's success in winning seven out of nine ODIs against Australia this year has consigned the four-time world

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Did U Know?

In 1975 an international match between Chile and Uruguay was abandoned after 19 players were sent off.



Abhinav Bindra

(India's Beijing Olympics gold medalist)

"The Indian Premier League is nothing but an over-hyped tournament. We have gone overboard with the whole thing."

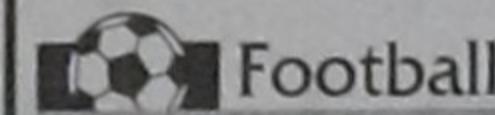
Demanding other sports in India to get more attention.



PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh football team captain Aminul Haque (R) and his teammates walk out of the BFF Bhaban prior to their departure for Kathmandu yesterday.

Booters reach Nepal



SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh national football team reached the Nepalese capital of Kathmandu yesterday to play a sole warm-up match against Nepal Police on Saturday.

After an initial delay at the airport due to arrival visas, the booters were taken to Kathmandu's Grand Hotel. The Bangladesh team rested after their arrival yesterday and is scheduled to practice today at the Tribhuvan University Ground. Their match will be held at 4:35 pm on Saturday and is reported to be held at the Dasarath Rangasala Stadium -- Nepal's biggest sporting arena.

Bangladesh's Brazilian coach Edson Dido has expressed dissatisfaction about the

team's progress during their four-week training camp prior to departing for Kathmandu, but conceded that communication between him and the players have improved.

"Four weeks of training is not enough for a national side when you want to change things completely and therefore we have not made any significant progress, but the players have started realizing what I want from them now."

Regardless of Bangladesh's shortcomings, Nepal Police will provide a stern test of credentials that will prepare the booters for the greater challenges of the Challenge Cup. The team will return on April 19.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has been busy with the preparation of the upcoming AFC Challenge Cup from April 26 and are chalking out ways of making the tournament attractive to fans.

The details of the tournament will be finalised on Sunday.

BCB asks Shaju to explain

SPORTS REPORTER

Shahjahan Shaju, the local coach who was reported to have punched an umpire during an age-level game on Wednesday, has been asked yesterday by BCB's game development committee to explain his actions.

According to a source in the cricket board, it was learned that the showcase notice was sent because of no video evidence of the assault.

The umpire, Alamgir Siddiqui, has sent a report to the concerned committees regarding the incident and while an action would have been forthcoming immediately, it is also important that both sides of the story is heard since this is a breach of discipline.

"Once his explanation arrives, we will reach a final decision," said the source.

SL under-19 due today

SPORTS REPORTER

The Sri Lankan under-19 team will arrive in the capital today.

The visitors will begin the tour with a two-day warm-up game at Fatullah Cricket Stadium on April 19 before their first of two three-day matches, scheduled for BKSP and Khulna. The five-match one-day series will begin in Jessor before Dhaka hosting the final four matches.

The Sri Lanka U-19 side is

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Anybody's game

AFP, New Delhi



Little-known cricketers and underdogs go into the Indian Premier League in South Africa with keen expectations as the event is not all about

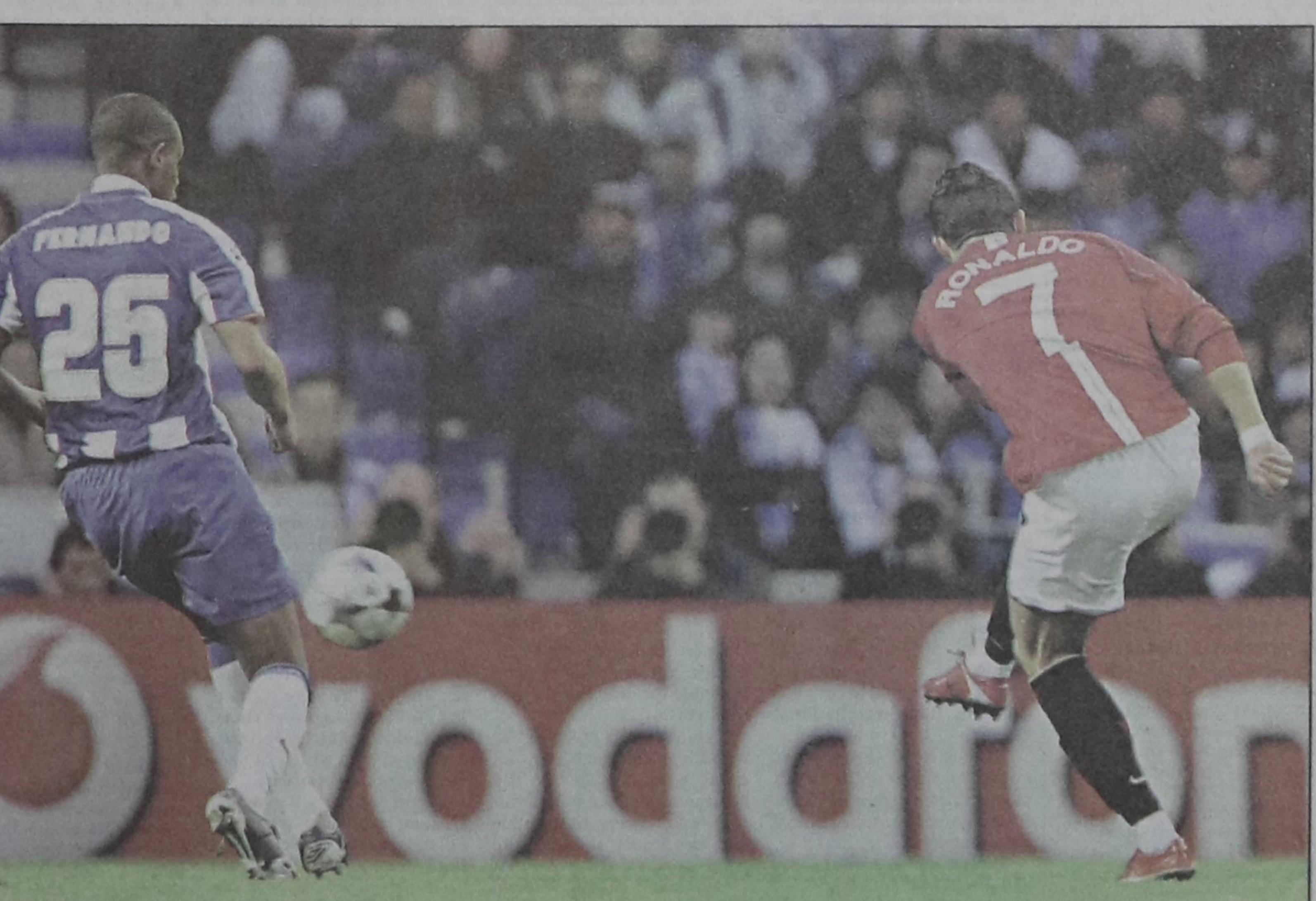
favoured.

Opener Shaun Marsh had not even played for Australia when signed by Kings XI Punjab in the inaugural tournament in India last year, but returned as the leading scorer with 616 runs.

Rajasthan Royals, the cheapest team at 67 million dollars, had mostly honest tries rather than superstars, but stunned the more fancied opposition on their way to the title under the leadership of Shane Warne.

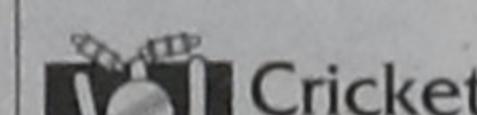
The first edition was a fascinating saga of Warne and his band of young warriors, who won 11 of their 14 league matches, ruining reputations of star-studded teams in the process.

Leg-spin wizard Warne, considered one of the most intelligent captains not to have led Australia, was always in the thick of things.



Manchester United forward Cristiano Ronaldo (R) lets fly from distance to score a stunning goal in their Champions League quarterfinal second leg tie against Porto at the Dragao Stadium on Wednesday.

Standing on a sticky wicket



MOHAMMAD ISAM

They say umpires and wicketkeepers get the short end of the stick in the cricket field. An umpire has to be on top of his game every delivery. On a good day, he is said to have done a decent job if he goes unnoticed as only the cricket connoisseur who understands the nuances of the game would definitely mention the umpire; but gone are the days of Neville Cardus.

These days the umpire is only noticed when he has made a mistake. It takes a lot out of a man to stand in the middle when the big screen shows the replay of his mistake within minutes of the error. And it is a brave umpire who doesn't get fazed by the boos and has the mental strength to do a good job thereafter.

Without a shadow of a doubt, umpiring is one of the most demanding jobs in Bangladesh. It involves one being fearless, diplomatic and

cool-headed. Add running faster than an angry mob and you have a superhero, something that club officials would want umpires to be.

But umpires cannot be superheroes, at least not in Bangladesh. Most have a hard time surviving on what they earn and try their best to live with dignity.

Some of the senior umpires, who have a space all on to themselves in the country's cricketing tradition, have often lamented the treatment they have been dished out at times. Among these seniors, some have been lucky enough to be elevated into the match referee while the less fortunate ones (of the same batch if not senior) have been given the utterly unenviable job of a reserve umpire.

In fact the work of an umpire has seldom seen the good days in domestic cricket. It is hard to find a player or a club official praising an umpire, in fact it is almost a custom to blame the umpire. There are several reasons like an inheritance of this bad habit or a simple lack of knowledge of the pitch.

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T20, an instant hit



AFP, Paris

Sleepy Southampton on England's south coast is an unlikely birthplace for a revolution, but on Friday, June 13, 2003, the first shots were fired in cricket's brave new world.

Guardian newspaper in the run-up to the 2008 season:

"We had crowds totalling 250,000 in 2003, 305,000 in 2004, 476,000 in 2005, 500,000 in 2006 and a bit over that last year."

"Every match brings an average of 75,000 pounds."

Ninety T20 matches were played in 2008.

"That means a total of 6.7 million pounds," added Perera. "Add on one million in sponsorship and the game is earning something approaching eight million for the counties."

Twenty20 has become a fixture of international tours and India, the driving force behind the IPL, are world

champions.

But as with most revolutions, blood has been spilt.

A group of West Indians became overnight millionaires when they won the controversial, and widely-damned, Stanford Twenty20 against England in the Caribbean last year.

English cricket has since severed all its ties with Allen Stanford after the Texan billionaire was accused of masterminding a 9.2-billion-dollar fraud.

Many fear not only the impact of Twenty20 on technique and tactics, but also on the future of Test cricket, the game's pre-eminent form.

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England superstar Andrew Flintoff, who will play for Chennai Super Kings in this year's Indian Premier League, pads up prior to a practice session in Cape Town on Thursday.

C'Ron stunner lifts Man United

AFP, Porto

Manchester United rekindled glorious European nights from their past as a stunning goal by Cristiano Ronaldo fired them to victory over Porto in their Champions League semifinal.

No English team had ever beaten the Portuguese champions on their own soil, but the winger's first-half wonder strike gave his team a 1-0 win on the night, 3-2 on aggregate, to set up an all-English semifinal tie with Arsenal.

Coming into the game as underdogs after a 2-2 draw at Old Trafford last week, United boss Sir Alex Ferguson urged his players to bring the spirit of the 1999 treble winning team to the Dragao Stadium.

One flash of genius from the Portuguese maestro coupled with gritty defensive play earned United glory and keeps the red half of Manchester dreaming of the quintuple.

United boss Ferguson started with the same formation as the first leg but had the luxury of picking a fit Rio Ferdinand in defence while midfielder Anderson was given a start against his old club.

The Dragons from Porto were intent on making the same type of start which rocked United last week, but after a promising opening they were stunned by a sixth minute rocket from Ronaldo.

There seemed no danger when the winger drove into the Porto half, but the World Player of

the Year took a swing of his right foot and unleashed an unstoppable shot from 35-yards into the top left-hand corner of Helton's goal.

The home team's attacks were disjointed, and it was through set-plays where they were looking most dangerous with defender Bruno Alves firing a 30-yard freekick narrowly wide of the post.

United had been undone by the Portuguese team's slick positional interchange at Old Trafford, and again it was when Rodriguez drifted in from the left-wing that they looked dangerous.

The Uruguayan winger found space on the edge of the area and floated a ball to Lucho Gonzalez but the midfielder's acrobatic volley was easily saved by visiting Edwin van der Sar.

It was therefore against the run of play when Ryan Giggs nearly doubled United's lead.

The Welshman fired in a volley from Dimitar Berbatov's cross but Helton did well to smother the shot and recovered before Ronaldo could pounce on the rebound.

However, things did get worse for Porto a minute later when midfield general Lucho was forced off with an injury to be replaced by last week's hero Mariano.

One of the misses of the season prevented United registering a perfect half which would probably have put the tie beyond their hosts.

Giggs whipped in a corner which found defender Nemanja Vidic after Berbatov's flick. Virtually on the goalline and with the goalkeeper nowhere, the Croat somehow sliced the

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