

BU, Ctg MSC in dire draw

SPORTS REPORTER

Visiting Chittagong Mohammedan held Brothers Union to a goalless draw in their Bangladesh League encounter at Birshreshtha Shaheed Sepoy Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

Away at the Osmani Stadium in Narayanganj, hosts Shukhtara Jubo Sangsad also played out a goalless draw against Beanibazar SC.

Their fourth draw in six matches meant Brothers Union still remained unbeaten to maintain fourth position of the 13-team table with 10 points, six behind third-placed Sheikh Russel KC as holders Abahani and Mohammedan are jointly leading the table with maximum 18 points.

The third consecutive draw helped Chittagong Mohammedan join fifth-placed Farshganj SC with six points each having played six outings.

Struggling Shukhtara Jubo Sangsad and Beanibazar raised their point tally to two and three respectively playing five matches and

stayed just above bottom-placed Muktijoddha Sangsad, who failed to taste any triumph having played only four outings.

At the Mostafa Stadium, both Brothers Union and Chittagong Mohammedan were unlucky to get full three points as the Gopibagh-based outfit squandered a penalty while the Chittagong outfit rattled the crossbar once and saw a goal struck by Farhad ruled out due to off-side. At the end, both side appeared satisfied with the draw.

The visitors, however, played better comparatively against Brothers, who still were missing their Ghanaian striking duo Enoch Benti and Steven Aboua, who are yet to return from their home following the break of the league for the SAFF Championship.

The Black and Whites of Chittagong started brilliantly and came close to taking the lead in the very third minute, but Farhad saw his back-volley blocked by Brothers defender Yousuf Ali from the goalline to frustrate the visitors. Then both sides fought hard to control the midfield and Brothers Union yielded a chance five minute from the breather when Sabuj whipped a cross from the right for Biplob, who narrowly

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India, Lanka arrive today

SPORTS REPORTER

A 16-member India team, led by Mahendra Singh Dhoni, will arrive in the city at noon today while a 15-member Sri Lanka team, led by Kumar Sangakkara, will arrive in the evening to participate in the tri-nation ODI series also involving hosts Bangladesh that begins on Monday.

India will also play a two-match Test series against Bangladesh after the tri-nation series.

Both teams will have their first practice sessions tomorrow at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur where the tournament proper will be held between January 4-13.

After the tri-nation meet, India will play the first Test against Bangladesh on January 17-21 at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong and the 2nd Test

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Khulna DC Gold Cup Football

SPORTS REPORTER

The Khulna Divisional Commissioner Gold Cup Football gets underway today. The tournament is being organised by Khulna Divisional Football Association and sponsored by Shahjalal Bank television channel AIN Bangla.

Ten divisional teams are taking part in the tournament. The matches of this knock-out tournament will take place at Satkhira and Kusthia Stadiums. Cabinet Secretary M Abdul Aziz will inaugurate the tournament which will be followed by the opening match between Satkhira and Jessore.

Indian boxers cross border

AFP, Karachi

India sent its first sports team to Pakistan in more than a year on Thursday as a seven-member boxing team flew into Karachi to compete in an international tournament.

The boxers are the first Indian sports team to cross the border since India stalled sporting links with Pakistan after the November 2008 attacks on Mumbai, which New Delhi blamed on militants based in Pakistan.

India refused to allow its cricket team to tour Pakistan late last year, citing security fears.

Pakistan sent tennis, squash and snooker players to compete in India last year but New Delhi resisted sending its own sportsmen to Pakistan.

The peace process between the two nuclear armed neighbours, which have fought three wars since independence from Britain in 1947, collapsed after the Mumbai attacks.

Head coach of the Indian boxing team, Shiv Singh, said the boxers were happy to tour Pakistan.

"We have been cleared by the government to take part in the event and all the members of the squad are very happy to be here," Singh told reporters at the airport in Karachi, Pakistan's financial capital.

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Workers paint a wall of the players' dressing room of the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. The venue is getting a facelift ahead of the tri-nation cricket series involving India and Sri Lanka besides Bangladesh.

PHOTO: STAR

Kaneria may play at SCG

Alam, Rauf to fly back home

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Pakistan leg-spinner Danish Kaneria has said he is likely to play the second Test against Australia in Sydney after recovering from the finger injury that ruled him out of the Boxing Day Test which Pakistan lost by 170 runs.

Kaneria, who is Pakistan's most experienced bowler, hoped his return would boost the team's prospects of levelling the three-match series.

"I will try my best to do something to help us win in Sydney and try to keep up the expectation from the captain and my team," Kaneria said. "If I can contribute myself, it will be a very good sign for the team."

Kaneria missed the first Test after injuring his finger during a training session and Pakistan were forced to play the off-spinner Saeed Ajmal instead.

"The injury was the ring finger of the right hand I got injured 18 months ago in England," he said. "I fractured it, and playing a domestic game in Pakistan once more I got hit on it. Then in the practice, I got badly hit taking a catch."

Face-to-face after 5 years

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

Five years have passed since Shane Watson and Mohammad Asif made their Test debuts at the Sydney Cricket Ground. Despite inauspicious outings -- Watson fell over delivering his first ball, Asif failed to take a wicket in either innings -- great things were expected of the duo by their respective nations, both of which had invested much time and many resources into their development.

This week, Watson and Asif return to the SCG having managed just 14 further Tests since their initial Sydney experience. Injuries, role realignment and, in the case of Asif, drug indiscretions have severely disrupted what might have been a prosperous few years at a time when both teams were desperately attempting to unearth a new generation of superstars. This certainly wasn't in the script.

Fate, however, has conspired to deliver both players back to the SCG in the kind of senior roles originally predicted for them. Granted, few in 2005 would have tipped Watson to one day open the innings at a time when he was

The venue for the second Test -- the SCG -- has traditionally favoured spin and there is a possibility, although a slim one, that Pakistan might play two spinners. Ajmal, however, struggled in Melbourne, taking only a wicket in each innings to finish with 223 for 2.

"I haven't bowled too much with Ajmal, but if I get a chance to bowl with him it will be great for us," Kaneria said. "It's all upon me -- how do I bowl and how do I perform? It's a big challenge for me to come back over here to Australia."

"I can't say that Australia don't play spin that well. Ajmal got only two wickets in Melbourne -- one in each innings. I don't think they play spin badly. They have started to play spin better and more professionally."

Should Kaneria play the Test beginning on January 3, it will be his second appearance at the SCG. He took 8 for 204 in his only Test there in 2005.

Meanwhile, left-handed batsman Fawad Alam and fast bowler Abdur Rauf have been asked to fly back home to leave Pakistan with a 15-man squad for the remaining two Tests.

"Pakistan Cricket Board has instructed the Team Management in Australia to send Fawad Alam and Abdur Rauf back immediately in

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Bhaji blasts dull pitches

CRICINFO, undated

In the aftermath of the Kotla fiasco, off-spinner Harbhajan Singh has lashed out at pitches that have nothing for the bowlers. While the abandoned one-day international in Delhi was a result of a "dangerous" pitch, tracks such as the one used in the high-scoring draw between India and Sri Lanka in Ahmedabad were also unfit for cricket, Harbhajan said.

"The Ahmedabad pitch was purely a batting pitch and bowlers, be it me, Amit Mishra or Muttiah Muralidaran, were butchered by the batsmen, which was not at all justice to the bowlers," Harbhajan told PTI.

A total of 1598 runs were scored in the Ahmedabad Test for just 21 wickets; there were seven centuries in the game, including a double, and Harbhajan's figures were 2 for 189. "We should not play Test matches on such kind of wickets, because they will finish all the bowlers. They are not fit for

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Dhoni wary of Tigers

Cricket

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mumbai

India's cricket captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni yesterday said Bangladesh are a good side and can beat any team on their day.

Talking to reporters on the evening before their departure for Dhaka, he said the presence of Bangladesh gives the tri-nation ODI series a 'tougher look'.

"It will be exciting. We are hoping this will be a continuity of the last series we played [against Sri Lanka]. Bangladesh are a good side and can beat any side on their day. We have to be fully prepared," said the wicketkeeper-batsman.

Admitting his side was a bit weak in bowling and fielding, Dhoni said that India missed specialised bowling and fielding coaches.

Flagging his concerns over some aspects of the bowling in the 'death' overs, he said, "It's a bit of a concern right now. In death overs, we are still struggling a bit but there's some improvement. We are on a low right now but I think it will only be a matter of time before we get it right."

About fielding, Dhoni said specialist fielding consultant of the team Mike Young of

Australia would not be available for the Bangladesh tour and the team would have to take forward whatever he taught them during his brief stint during the T20 and one-day series against Sri Lanka recently.

"Fielding is one aspect of the game that is important whatever the format of the game is. We dropped quite a few catches in the last series.



MAHENDRA SINGH DHONI

We will try to rectify that.

"Whatever good fielders we have, we will try to make them the best in the world because it really helps especially in the middle overs with four good fielders inside the circle who can save the singles," the Indian captain said.

India's bowling coach Venkatesh Prasad and fielding

coach Robin Singh were sacked in October last year after the country's poor show in the Twenty20 World Cup and Champions Trophy, both in South Africa.

The Indian skipper said team coach Gary Kirsten had had his plate full as he is looking at several aspects and it always helps when there are separate bowling and field coaches.

Dhoni said although the side will miss Sachin Tendulkar, who has opted out to get some rest, it is important to give the master batsman a break.

"We will miss Sachin. Whether you play Bangladesh or any other team, you want him in the dressing room. But at the same time, it's important to give him rest. He's been playing for the last twenty years," Dhoni said.

He also praised the return of Rohit Sharma to the Indian team after he had been ignored on return from the West Indies tour in July and described the Mumbai batsman as a very talented player who needed to be given a fixed slot in the batting order.

"As far as Rohit is concerned, he's one of the most talented cricketers we now have. We were not really able to give him a specific position in the side. He should be given a run of five or ten games to build a space."

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Women's cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Khulna beat Sylhet by 85 runs in their clash of the Women's national Cricket League at Khulna University Ground yesterday.

Batting first, Khulna scored 161 runs in 50 overs, thanks to a half-century from opener Shukhtara Rahman. She scored 52 runs off 116 ball which included four boundaries.

Shukhtara then took two wickets for 15 runs as Sylhet crumbled for 76 in 43.5 overs.

In the other match at the Khulna Divisional Stadium, Chittagong defeated Barisal by 28 runs.

Batting first, Chittagong scored 111 runs losing all their wickets in 50 overs. Champa Chakma scored highest 18 runs while Soheli Sultana took four wickets for Barisal.

Champa then starred with the ball as she took two important wickets to restrict Barisal to 83 runs.



PHOTO: STAR

Barisal players celebrate the dismissal of a Chittagong batter during their Women's National Cricket League encounter at the Khulna Divisional Stadium yesterday.

Forgettable Pak year

Cricket

AFP, Karachi

The attack on the touring Sri Lankan team decimated Pakistan's international cricket and made 2009 one of the worst years for a sport followed by millions, former captain Wasim Akram said Thursday.

"Attacks on the Sri Lankan team blew away our cricket," Wasim told AFP of the shocking gun and grenade assault on the scheduled third day of the second Test between Pakistan and Sri Lanka in Lahore last March.

"They made the year the most unforgettable in our history," he added.

The brazen attacks, which left eight people dead besides injuring seven Sri Lankan players and their assistant coach, put paid to Pakistan's chances of hosting any international cricket in the near future.

Following the attacks, the International Cricket Council (ICC), which had already shifted the Champions Trophy out of Pakistan in early 2009, also took away the 14 matches Pakistan was due to host in the 2011 World Cup.

Pakistan protested, threatened legal action and sought to hold its World Cup games in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), but the ICC was unmoved as co-hosts India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh insisted it was a South Asia tournament.

Pakistan's matches were distributed among the other three hosts in a deal which will give Pakistan financial compensation.

With teams reluctant to tour the troubled nation because of concerns over militants attacks, Pakistan was forced to play Australia and New Zealand on the neutral territory of the UAE.

Even Zimbabwe refused to send an Under-19 team to Pakistan over security fears.

Wasim said Pakistan needs to find a permanent away venue to overcome financial losses.

"Because of teams not willing to tour Pakistan, our team has played very little cricket and we now need to find a permanent away venue to not only give our players some cricket, but also to overcome financial losses," said Wasim.

Pakistan Cricket Board chairman Ijaz Butt this month estimated annual losses of 71 percent on television rights (worth 140.5 million dollars for five years).

"We have been incurring 71 percent annual

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Kirti Azad

(Former India cricket star) "Even Prime Minister Manmohan Singh won't be able to improve things as there are proxies running the system." While coming down heavily on the bureaucratic practices in the Delhi and District Cricket Association which is facing huge criticism for producing an unfit pitch for the fifth and final ODI between India and Sri Lanka on December 27.



STAR Cricket
Australia v Pakistan
Second Test, Day One
Live from 5:30am (Sunday)



Day's Event
Bangladesh League
Muktijoddha v Feni Soccer
Venue: Kamalapur Stadium
Time: 2:45pm