

ICC happy with preparations

SPORTS REPORTER

The organisers of 2011 ICC Cricket World Cup have expressed their satisfaction over the progress of the preparations for the mega event to be co-hosted by Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka.

International Cricket Council's (ICC) chief executive officer Haroon Lorgat informed the press yesterday after a routine meeting of the central organising committee (COC), chaired by its chairman Sharad Pawar at a local hotel, that they made good progress on way to making it a grand success.

"COC chairman Sharad Pawar met with Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and it is great that she has committed to attend the opening ceremony, indicating support at the very highest level," Lorgat informed. The next COC meeting will be held in Sri Lanka in April.

Bangladesh will host eight matches in Dhaka and Chittagong including two quarterfinals beside the opening ceremony to be held on February 17 next year at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Question was raised whether the extravagant

opening ceremony by itself will draw a full-house crowd when there is no match to be played on the day, but convenor of the COC Mahbubul Anam assured everybody that it would be a full-house event.

"It was full-house in the 2004 Under-19 World Cup

opening ceremony at the same venue. We can assure you that there would be no difference this time," said the bearded organiser.

Tournament director Ratnakar Shetty also hoped that there would be no shortage of excitement in the open-

ing ceremony. "We have to make sure that spectators should come to the stadium," said Shetty.

The respective host country has got the rights to decide about the ticket rate and Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president AHM Mustafa

Kamal assured everybody that they would fix most competitive ticket rates including the opening ceremony so that fans can turn to the ground from all walks of life.

"We will try our best to fix the ticket price as cheap as we can so that the common peo-

ple can afford it to be a part of the event in the ground," hoped Kamal adding that all preparations are taking place.

Security is a big issue with the cricket's extravaganza as Pakistan already lost it's right as co-hosts due to security reason, but COC chairman Pawar said that they were confident that they would be able to take the opportunity to prove that the region was safe.

"We are confident," was the response of Pawar, who is also an Indian federal minister.

Shetty informed that the ICC and the other organising committees are working on the visa issue to make sure that there is sufficient flexibility in the visa processing during the World Cup.

Question was also raised about the poor turnout in the ongoing tri-nation tournament involving India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, but Lorgat said that it would be unwise to mix-up a World Cup event with a tri-nation competition.

"The cricket World Cup is all the richer for having Bangladesh as one of its hosts. With just over one year to go before we call play on this huge event, I urge everyone involved in our great sport in Bangladesh to pledge support for the event and make it as memorable as it promises to be," he said.



International Cricket Council's vice-president Sharad Pawar (C) speaks while ICC CEO Haroon Lorgat and BCB president AHM Mustafa Kamal listens at the media briefing of 2011 World Cup unveiling at a local hotel yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR



The India - Sri Lanka game today will be more like a dress rehearsal for the finals of the tri nations tournament. Bangladesh will have to play out of its skin to beat India by a big margin on Monday and qualify for the finals that is of course if Sri Lanka beat India again on Sunday. That looks bit tough looking at the inexperienced bowling attack that the home team has. That's why it is baffling how Shakib Al Hassan opted to bat first against India when he knew that dew was going to hamper his bowlers in gripping the ball. Being a spinner himself he should have realised that a wet ball is hardly conducive to spin and so should have fielded first. Be that as it may, India too will have to play very well against a Sri Lankan side that seems determined to erase the memory of their recent tour to India where they lost both the Test and one-day series. Mahela Jayawardene's return not only adds class to the batting but also brings with it loads of experience which any skipper would be happy to utilise. The pitches here have been a graveyard for the bowlers and there is neither lateral movement nor turn off the pitch and with the ball barely bouncing above the waist the batsmen can just play down the line without any fears of the ball doing something. In the Bangladesh - Lanka game the odd ball was keeping low which is what batsmen may have to watch out for otherwise it is simply close your eyes and go bang bang.

The change in timings by just half an hour is a purely cosmetic one and makes no cricketering sense at all. If the timing had to be changed it should have been by a couple of hours at least for that would have meant the bowlers would have had to bowl only a dozen overs or so with the dew affected ball. So far in the tournament the team that has fielded second has lost the game because its bowlers are severely handicapped by the wet ball and so winning the toss becomes crucial. Only if the team batting first puts up a huge 350 plus score will they have a chance of winning the match and that too is not certain.

India have problems with its bowling with all the bowlers getting a pasting. They should have given Tyagi an opportunity earlier so as to see how he bowls and an unknown bowler always gets a few overs in quietly as batsmen try and suss him out and those overs could well make the difference. The big plus is the temperament shown by Virat Kohli. He looks a good reader of the situation and adjusts his batting according to the needs of the team. Plus, his quicksilver fielding makes him a huge asset. What a change one year has made as the young lad is now showing that he is prepared to learn and not that he knows everything which was the impression created in his first year. If he continues in the same manner he will not only go on to become one of India's top players but also a winning skipper.

India must win the Sunday game to wrest back the psychological advantage from Sri Lanka.

No football for seven weeks

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh League, the professional football league, will remain suspended for at least seven weeks for the participation of the Under-23 national team in South Asian Games in Bangladesh and the senior teams in the AFC Challenge Cup finals in Sri Lanka.

"In a bid to immediately start the U-23 national football team's camp for the SA Games, the Bangladesh League will remain suspended at the end of the eighth round of the Bangladesh League for a certain period," said a Bangladesh Football Federation press release yesterday.

The matches of the eight round will be held on Monday. Meanwhile, Bangladesh will host the 11th South Asian Games to be held from January 29 to February 9.

The league will resume after the completion of the AFC Challenge Cup finals where the Bangladesh national team will play. The Challenge Cup is scheduled for February 16-27 in Sri Lanka.

Meanwhile, the third edition of the professional football league had earlier faced a suspension for almost six weeks following the preparation of the national team for the SAFF Championship.

India eye final spot

SPORTS REPORTER



An in-form Sri Lanka side will welcome the return of their most prolific batsman Tillakaratne Dilshan when they face India in their last group match of the triangular Idea Cup at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium today.

Dilshan, currently the number one batsman in one-day cricket, has been in supreme form for the last couple of months. But he has been out of play with a groin injury since the opening match of the tournament in which he scored a hundred against Bangladesh. Sri Lanka though seemed unruffled by his injury and went on to win all the three matches to book a ticket for final.

However, his inclusion will strengthen the batting line up that has already been boosted with the return of Mahela Jayawardene who flew in from Sri Lanka and immediately scored a hundred in his first match against Bangladesh.

Today though they face a stiffer opposition in India

who need a win from their last two matches to be in the final. This is going to be their 21st meeting in the past nineteen months. India hold a 12-7 edge over the islanders, but Sri Lanka do look much the stronger side in this tournament and they won their first encounter with India quite comfortably by five wickets.

Going into their second meeting, India's talented batsman Virat Kohli feels the formbook holds for little in today's context and reminded that India would have to be at their best to beat Sri Lanka.

"We have played a lot between us in the last few months. We know each other's strengths and weaknesses very well. It will be a tough match but we want to beat them."

Kohli, who has been in and out of the India side a couple of times, didn't have a great match against the Sri Lankans in the earlier meeting as he scored only nine runs. He made it up in the next match against Bangladesh scoring 91 runs and giving his captain ample support in registering an easy victory. The 21-year-old stylish batsman is confident India will win Sunday's match and ensure their final berth without having to depend on the outcome of the last group

match against Bangladesh.

"We have sorted out our mistakes of the earlier game and tried to rectify those mistakes. Hopefully we will make sure of the final by winning against Sri Lanka."

But the biggest talking point of the tournament has been the impact of dew and the importance of winning the toss. All the four games played so far have been won by the team batting second under conditions which make it very hard to have control over the ball in the latter part as dew plays havoc. So, will today's match prove to be another forgone conclusion, or will the tide be turned? The neutrals will pray that the latter proves right.

PROBABLE TEAMS

SRI LANKA: Upul Tharanga, Tillakaratne Dilshan, Kumar Sangakkara (captain), Mahela Jayawardene, Thilan Samaraweera, Thilina Kandamby, Thissara Perera, Suraj Randiv, Nuwan Kulasekara, Thilan Thushara, Malinga Bandara.

INDIA: Virender Sehwag, Gautam Gambhir, Virat Kohli, Yuvraj Singh, MS Dhoni (captain), Suresh Raina, Ravindra Jadeja, Harbhajan Singh, Zaheer Khan, Ashish Nehra, Shanthakumaran Sreesanth.



India batsman Yuvraj Singh (L) pulls a handspring while the Sri Lankan squad engage in drills on Saturday prior to their group match at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium today.

PHOTOS: STAR



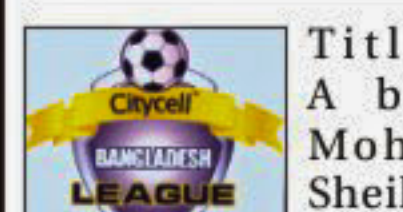
BTV & NEO Cricket
India v Sri Lanka
Fifth ODI, Idea Cup
Live from 2:00pm

ESPN
English Premiership
West Ham v Wolves
Live from 7:25pm

Liverpool v Tottenham
Live from 9:55pm

Giants all win away

SPORTS REPORTER



Title contenders Abahani, Mohammedan and Sheikh Russel sailed past their respective opponents in away matches of the Bangladesh League in different venues across the country yesterday.

A brace from Ghanaian striker Sheriff Din Mohammed helped holders Abahani hand a 2-0 defeat to Chittagong Mohammedan at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong while Dhaka Mohammedan also recorded an identical 2-0 win over Brothers Union at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Sepoy Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur, thanks to a strike each from Nasir and Nasiruddin.

Away at the Sylhet Stadium, Sheikh Russel crushed newcomers Beanibazar SC 3-0 riding on a pair from Moroccan striker Samir Omari, who consolidated his position to raise his goal tally to nine, two ahead of Abahani's Sheriff Din Mohammed.

Both Abahani and Mohammedan have kept their hundred percent winning records having secured maximum 24 points in eight outings, two points cushion over Sheikh Russel KC.

Defeated Brothers Union have 10 points from eight matches while Beanibazar and Chittagong Mohammedan stuck to six points each. The Sylhet outfit, however, have played a match less than the port city outfit.

Abahani, who overcame the away-match hurdle against Feni Soccer and Chittagong Abahani through penalty goals, again went ahead in the 26th minute through a penalty goal converted by Sheriff, who later sealed the fate of the match in the 73rd minute through his seventh goal in the league to surpass his teammate Enamul Haque and Mohammedan's striker Zahid Hasan Emily to grab the second spot in the scorers' list.

The eighth win in as many matches meant Abahani extended their unbeaten streak to 19 matches of which 11 matches were in the second

edition of the professional football league.

At Sylhet Stadium, having struck the league's second hattrick in the previous match, Moroccan striker Omari maintained his rich vein of form to give Sheikh Russel a deserved lead in the 25th minute against Beanibazar, a side who defeated Brothers Union 2-1 in their previous home match.

League's top-scorer Omari doubled the margin three minutes into the second half while Yousuf made it 3-0 nine minutes from time to give Sheikh Russel their seventh victory in eight matches.

At the Kamalapur Stadium, Mohammedan woke up from a slumber after surviving from a goal scare from Brothers' Ghanaian striker Enok Bentil whos thunderous shot from outside the box rattled the crossbar on 21 minutes.

The Black and Whites reorganised to step up the attack and almost yielded a scoring chance in the 26th minute when a rebound off a Mamunul Islam freekick came to Nasir,

playing as a winger instead of his familiar role of right-back, who drove a grounder only to be blocked by Brothers goalkeeper Apu at the goalline.

The constant pressure finally paid off for Mohammedan when Nasir changed his wing with Mamunul Islam, who whipped a cross from the right and Nasir just tapped the ball home to put the Motijheel-based outfit ahead in the 34th minute.

Two minutes later, striker Nasiruddin, playing his second match of the league doubled the margin with a simple header as the former Army man connected well with a cross from left-back Wali Faisal though Brothers goalkeeper Jahangir may have saved it.

With five minutes remaining of the break, Mohammedan captain Arman Aziz let loose a grounder outside the box that narrowly went wide of the Brothers' sidebar while Enock came close to reimbursing a goal in stoppage time when his side-volley off a Ranjit cross went inches over the crossbar.

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Yousuf bucks up mates



CRICINFO, undated

Pakistan will hope to pick up the pieces from the traumatic Sydney defeat as they build-up to what will now be a dead rubber at Hobart, where the best they can do is avoid a fourth successive whitewash at the hands of Australia.

The squad has taken the 36-run loss hard and Mohammad Yousuf, the captain, has been trying since to lift the side for the final Test, which begins on January 14. "The team was very, very disappointed after Sydney," Yousuf told Cricinfo.

"But as I told them after the Melbourne loss, we have to see that we continue to play good cricket. We could and should have won at Sydney but we didn't. Few people thought that we could match Australia before we came on this tour, but we played very well here for three days and had one very poor day."

The comments would seem to reinforce what has been the main criticism of Pakistan on this tour; that the side hasn't believed at any point they could challenge and topple Australia. The opening days of the Boxing Day Test and the last at the SCG were particularly illuminating, when Pakistan veered between timidity and blind panic.

Reaction in Pakistan has been predictably harsh, which also reveals how eagerly this series was being followed. Jamshed Dasti, head of the national assembly's committee on sports, has been at the forefront of the backlash, asking with force once again for the ouster of the PCB chief Ijaz Butt. This time there might be enough momentum building for it to result in something.

A number of ex-players, as expected, have not held back, asking for the heads of Yousuf, coach Intikhab Alam, the selection committee and a number of other players. "I think we can

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Venus not retiring



AFP, Hong Kong

American Venus Williams on Friday dismissed speculation she is mulling retirement as the seven-time Grand Slam champion gets set to play in the Australian Open later this month.

"I know I have so much more to give," she told reporters after an exhibition match in Hong Kong.

"There's no timeline [for retirement] if I'm playing well... As long as I keep playing well, I'll stay."

The American struggled for much of 2009, losing her Wimbledon crown to sister Serena and then crashing out of the Beijing Open in October, prompting speculation that she may be considering a departure from the game.

Williams was in strong form on Friday though as she overpowered Zheng Jie, with a 6-3, 6-2 victory over her Chinese opponent.

Zheng, ranked 35 in the world, took an early 2-0 lead in the first set but Williams powered back to overtake the 26-year-old Chengdu native.

Williams continued the pressure in the second set, blasting Zheng with her powerful serve.

"Every game was a battle," Williams said.

"There are so many things [Zheng] does well."

Earlier Friday, Japan's Ayumi Morita beat 24-year-old Argentine Gisela Dulko 7-5, 3-6, and 10-4 in a tiebreak.

The Hong Kong tournament features four teams with three players each -- representing Russia, Europe, the Americas and Asia Pacific -- in singles and mixed doubles play.

The tournament, which wraps up Saturday, comes before the Australian Open on January 18-31, the first Grand Slam of the season.