

Henry confirms int'l retirement

French striker Thierry Henry on Thursday confirmed that he has retired from international football after making 123 appearances and scoring a record 51 goals for France. Appearing at a press conference at the Red Bull Arena, the 32-year-old explained the reasons behind his decision. "I've worn (the French shirt) 123 times and I've always had goosebumps when I've worn the blue jersey," he said. "But you have to know when to stop. There are young players coming through."



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Blangladesh Ansar's Jewel Ahmed muscles through to a national record in the 100m butterfly with a timing of 01:01.60 minutes on the concluding day of the BRB Cables 26th National Age-Group Swimming Championship at the National Swimming Complex in Mirpur yesterday.

Nazma-Jewel show 26th National Age-Group Swimming ends

Swimming

SPORTS REPORTER

Setting seven national records each and claiming a staggering total of 19 gold medals between themselves, Bangladesh Ansar duo Nazma Khatun and Jewel Ahmed lit up the National Swimming Complex in Mirpur at the conclusion of the BRB Cables 26th National Age-Group Swimming Championship yesterday.

But the competition was conducted through hand-timing after the electronic scoreboard in the complex could not be used.

According to Bangladesh Swimming Federation (BSF) officials, they sent repeated letters to the National Sports Council (NSC) to send an expert to run the scoreboard but to no avail and the board that was used during the SA Games earlier this year, remained shut for the duration of the three-day junior meet.

13-year-old Nazma, who looks very much her age, broke the country's junior record for the 400m freestyle (girls' 13-14 years) with a timing of 05:32.46 minutes, beating the previous record of 05:39.67 minutes.

She also won gold medals in the 200m butterfly, finishing in 3:00.74 minutes, and the 100m freestyle (01:11.04) on the third and final day, ending with nine gold medals.

Over the three days of competition, Nazma broke records in the girls' 13-14 age-group in 100m backstrokes (1:20.77 minutes), 200m freestyle (2:32.13 minutes), 200m individual medley (2:55.24 minutes), 50m butterfly (31.23 seconds), 100m butterfly (1:15.37 minutes) and 200m backstroke (2:55.55 minutes) and the 400m freestyle she broke on the final day.

Unsurprisingly, she was crowned the girls individual champion while teammate Jewel won the boys' title for his equally stellar show, claiming 10 gold medals in all.

Jewel, the elder and much taller of the two

marauding Ansar duo, broke the record in the 1500m freestyle (boys' 15-17 years) with a timing of 18:40.08 minutes, beating the previous best of 19:13.40 minutes and the 100m butterfly (01:01.60) bettering the old record of 01:01.81 minutes.

He also won gold in the 200m backstroke, finishing in 02:29.82 minutes.

On the previous two days, Jewel broke the records in the 15-17 age-group in 100m freestyle (58.93 seconds), 200m individual medley (2:23.02 minutes), 400m freestyle (4:38.17 minutes), 100m backstroke (1:05:34 minutes) and 400m individual medley (5:11.09 minutes).

But Jewel and Nazma could not prevent BKSP from being the top team in the competition although both Ansar and the Savar-based sports institute finished on 45 gold medals each. But BKSP took the first position by winning more medals in total (120 medals) than Ansar (91 medals). Ansar, on the second day, overtook the medals table but BKSP roared back with good performances in several events throughout the day.

Agrajtra Swimming Club came in third place with four gold, two silver and a bronze medal.

Adding to the national records set by Nazma and Jewel, five in total were set on the final day. Shikha Khatun of BKSP broke the 50m freestyle (girls 18-20 years) record with a timing of 32.30 seconds. The previous national record was 32.56 seconds. Palash Chowdhury, also of BKSP, broke the 200m breaststroke (boys 15-17 years) with a timing of 02:38.23 minutes.

Nagib Khandaker of Lalon Shah Swimming Club also broke a national record on the day, finishing his 50m freestyle (boys 18-20 years) in 25.41 seconds.

BKSP trio Sarwar Hossain (5m platform), Sadi Mohammad Mohsin (1m spring board) and Anik Islam (3m spring board) set national records in all three diving events.

Rain looms over Galle

First Lanka-India Test starts today

Cricket

AFP, Galle

Sri Lanka's world record holder Muttiah Muralidaran was geared up to bowl for the last time in the first Test against India from Sunday, but bad weather threatened to disrupt his swansong.

The prolific off-spinner, 38, will retire from Test cricket after the opening contest of the three-match series at the Galle International Stadium, in which he needs eight more scalps to reach the 800-wicket mark.

Heavy rain on Saturday afternoon forced the ground staff to cover the entire field and similar bad weather has been forecast on all five days of the match.

Muralidaran enters his 133rd Test with record hauls in both Test (792) and one-day cricket (515) and looking to spearhead Sri Lanka to victory over the world number one team.

Sri Lanka's favourite cricketing son said he was as nervous going into Sunday's match as he was when he made his debut against Australia in 1992. "It does not matter how many games you play, you still feel a little nervous before any Test match," he said. "But all that goes away after I have bowled a few overs."

"There is obviously some pressure since this is my last Test, but I want to enjoy the moment. Getting to 800 will be a bonus, but our aim is to win



PHOTO: REUTERS

ONE LAST FLING: Sri Lanka legend Muttiah Muralidaran bowls on the eve of his last Test match to be played at the Galle International Stadium against India from today.

the match."

Former Sri Lankan spinner Jayananda Warnaweera, who manages the Galle stadium, was confident Muralidaran will reach the 800-wicket mark on what appeared to be a good batting track.

"This is a good wicket," said Warnaweera. "We did not produce a turner because Murali does not need one to take wickets. He can grab a handful on any surface."

"We don't want the match

to end before five days. There is a little bit of grass left to hold the pitch together. But any wicket will turn on the last two days."

International Cricket Council President Sharad Pawar said Muralidaran's achievements for Sri Lanka will inspire a new generation of young cricketers.

"I am sure there will be cricket lovers all over the world who will hope that Muttiah Muralidaran breaks

the 800 Test wicket barrier," Pawar said in a statement from ICC headquarters in Dubai.

"He has re-written the history book and created a mark that will be difficult to surpass. He is a true legend of our great sport," Pawar said.

Muralidaran has claimed 103 wickets in the 14 Tests he has played against all opposition at Galle, 13 of them against India in two matches.

Sri Lanka, currently fourth

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Dhoni wants to make it tough for Murali

REUTERS, Galle

Sri Lanka's Muttiah Muralidaran needs just eight wickets in his final Test appearance to become the first player to reach the 800-mark but India skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni has no intention of making it easy for him.

The first Test between Sri Lanka and India, which starts on Sunday, marks Muralidaran's farewell to Test cricket and the 38-year-old goes into the game with 792 Test wickets.

"We'll try to make it tough for him because the kind of cricket that he has played he has always made it tough for the batsmen to score runs," said Dhoni.

"In the same way, the batsmen are getting an opportunity not to let him get 800 wickets. If we don't make it tough for him then we are not doing justice to his talent."

Galle Stadium curator Jayananda Warnaweera, who bowled with Muralidaran for Sri Lanka in the early 1990's, ruled out any chance of producing a turning pitch to suit the world's leading international wicket-taker.

"We want to have a good time with Murali on all five days so we have to prepare a good wicket to last that long," said Warnaweera.

Galle is one Muralidaran's favourite venues having captured 103 wickets from 14 Tests.

India, who have failed to win a Test series in Sri Lanka since 1993-94, will be encouraged by the fact that on their last tour in 2008 their solitary Test win was at Galle.

Opener Virender Sehwag scored a double century and off-spinner Harbhajan Singh took 10 wickets for 153.

Sri Lanka captain Kumar

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Jatrabari post easy win

SPORTS REPORTER

Jatrabari Krira Chakra earned a 2-0 victory over Agrani Bank in the Basundhara Senior Division Football League at the Birshreshtha Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

Asif opened the scoring in the 18th minute before Robin made it 2-0 in the 53rd minute.

Dhaka Wanderers Club take on Purbachal Parishad in today's first match while Mohakhali XI face Motijheel T&T Club in the day's other game.

Butt new Pak captain

Cricket

AFP, London

Salman Butt will take over the Pakistan captaincy from Shahid Afridi for next week's second and final Test against Australia at Headingley, Pakistan tour manager Yawar Saeed told AFP on Saturday.

He revealed Afridi, who has been struggling with a side strain, had been released from the Test squad and so would not play at Headingley, in Leeds, northern England, where the Australia finale starts on Wednesday.

Saeed added Butt, currently the vice-captain, would also lead Pakistan in their subsequent four Test series against England, starting at Trent Bridge on July 29.

Afridi, who remains Pakistan's one-day and Twenty20 skipper, announced the Headingley

fixture would be his last Test after leading Pakistan to a 150-run defeat by Australia in the series opener at Lord's here on Friday.

That was Afridi's first Test in four years and so the 30-year-old's latest farewell to the five-day format has taken place after just one match back.

"Salman Butt will be the captain for the next five [Test] matches, starting against Australia in Leeds," Saeed confirmed, adding wicketkeeper Kamran Akmal would be the vice-captain.

Left-handed opener Butt was Pakistan's top-scorer in both innings at Lord's with 63 and 92.

After the match, which Pakistan lost with more than a day to spare, Afridi said the 25-year-old Butt, who has now played 28 Tests, should become captain.

"Salman is showing his maturity," batsman Afridi explained. "He's good enough to take

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PHOTO: STAR

Nazma Khatun (R) and Jewel Ahmed pose with their individual winners' plaque on the concluding day of the BRB Cables 26th National Age-Group Swimming Championship at the National Swimming Complex in Mirpur yesterday.

Nasir, Riaz beat Ajax

SPORTS REPORTER

Sonali Bank won their match against Ajax Sporting Club 2-1 in the Green Delta Insurance Premier Hockey League at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

The winners took a lead in the very first minute of the match when striker Shahjad Nasir scored through a field goal.

Rana Jubaer Riaz followed him and scored the second goal for Sonali Bank from a penalty corner in the 11th minute.

Ajax managed to pull one back at the stroke of half-time when Intiaz Ahmed struck

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