

## Paul backing English bid

Paul the octopus, the oracle of the World Cup in South Africa, has become an official ambassador for England's bid to host the tournament in 2018, organisers said Friday. Paul, who was hatched in England but has spent the last two years in an aquarium in western Germany, joins footballers David Beckham and Rio Ferdinand, Formula One driver Lewis Hamilton and singers Noel Gallagher and Sting in backing the bid.



## Manik set for MSC coach role

SPORTS REPORTER

Shafiqul Islam Manik is all set to return to his old outfit when the football committee of Mohammedan Sporting Club proposed him as coach for the upcoming season.

"The meeting has proposed to appoint Manik as a coach and the proposal has been sent to the convener for the final decision," said Sayeed Hasan Kanon, a member of the MSC football committee yesterday.

Kanon, the former national goalkeeper, said that the committee also placed a budget of Tk 3 crore to the ad-hoc committee in a bid to build the football squad ahead of the players transfer on September 1-20.

"Some 17 to 18 players have already been in our consideration and we will search for better players once we get the approval of the budget, which will also include the payment of the foreign players," said Kanon.

## Airtel to sponsor India's home matches

AFP, New Delhi

Telecom giant Bharti Airtel was on Friday named as the sponsor for all international cricket played in India after offering to pay 700,000 dollars per match, India's cricket board said.

The three-year deal covers all Test, one-day and Twenty20 matches, and with India scheduled to play at least 50 matches in the period, the board stands to earn 35 million dollars.

"Bharti Airtel has won the series sponsorship rights for the period of 2010-2013 with a bid amount of 33.3 million rupees per Test/ODI/T20 International," board secretary N Srinivasan said in a one-line statement.

Airtel beat telecom rivals Idea Cellular and mobile phone makers Karbonn Mobile and MicroMax in an open bid that was finalised by the board's marketing committee in Mumbai on Friday.

The minimum bid price set by the board was 20 million rupees (428,815 dollars) per match.

This is the first time sponsors have been named for home series for a fixed term. The earlier deal was held by World Sports Group, a sports agency who then sold the rights to companies on a series-by-series basis.

Airtel also sponsors the Twenty20 Champions League, an international club competition, whose second edition will be played in South Africa next month.

## Lofty goal for Sky Blues

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

Three-time Bangladesh League champions Abahani began their preparation yesterday with their focus firmly on securing a fourth consecutive Bangladesh league title.

The Dhanmondi-based outfit is the second club, to start their preparation well before the start of the players transfer after a rejuvenated Muktiyoddha Sangsad. And the club management urged the players to maintain the discipline strictly vowing to provide all sort of support necessary for a successful season.

Despite failing to retain the services of last season's goalkeeper Biplob Bhattacharjee, defenders Rajani Kantan Barman, Mohammad Sujon, Atiqur Rahman Mishu, midfielders Motiur Munna, Shahedul Alam, Zahed Parvez Chowdhury and illustrious striker Enamul Haque, the Sky Blues believe they retain enough fuel to launch a shot at this season's title.

To make up for the extensive losses, Abahani have roped in veteran striker Alfaz Ahmed, Amit Khan Shuvro, Choumin Rakhain, Shakawat Ronny, Abdullah Parvez alongside veterans like Mehdi Hasan Ujjal, Nazrul Islam, Ibnul Siraji, Pranotosh Kumar, Mohammad Robin, Abul Hossain, Zia, Shohag, Mintu and Biplob.

Claiming that Abahani have a balanced side,

manager Satyajit Das Rupu said, "We lost some key players, and at the same time we have roped in some quality players alongside the old guys and this has ultimately strengthened our side as the local players are mostly of similar quality."

"Last season three foreign players were eligible to play in a match and this time five foreigners will play in a match and I think they will make the difference and we are aiming to bring in quality players apart from last season's defender Samad Yousuf and striker Awudu Ibrahim," said Rupu adding that three Nigerian and two Ghanaian players were in the pipeline.

Rupu also added that there was a distinct possibility that Abahani would rope in an experienced coach from the Middle East.

Abahani last season only clinched the professional football league title after going down to archrivals Mohammedan in the Federation Cup final.

Despite having topped in the Group A of the AFC President's Cup qualifiers, Abahani were eliminated to Kyrgyzstan champions Dordoi on goal difference.

"Our target is to win all five titles Abahani will play in for the coming season and the first target is to win Bordului Trophy in India," said Rupu adding that they have also set their sights on the Federation Cup, Super Cup, Bangladesh League and AFC President's Cup.

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Veteran striker Alfaz Ahmed leads the drill session for his new side Abahani at the club ground in Dhanmondi yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

## Pakistan have the edge

Cricket

AFP, London

Alastair Cook ended the first slump of his international career with an innings of 110 as England fought back in the third Test against Pakistan at The Oval here on Friday.

But the match was still in the balance at tea on the third day.

England, looking to go 3-0 up in this four-match series, were 194 for three in their second innings, a lead of 119, with Pakistan still to bat again.

Jonathan Trott was 36 not out and fellow South Africa-born batsman Kevin Pietersen 23 not out.

Left-handed opener Cook had managed just 106 runs in his eight previous Test innings, at home to Bangladesh and Pakistan.

But the selectors' decision to keep faith with him ahead of England's Ashes defence in Australia later this year was rewarded with the 25-year-old Essex batsman's 13th hundred in 59 Tests and third in seven against Pakistan.

Cook dominated a third-wicket partnership of 116, contributing 87 runs to Trott's 25.

Nought not out overnight, Cook started scratchily on Friday in overcast conditions that threatened to provide plenty of assistance for Pakistan's swing bowlers and was fortunate when a cut off Mohammad Asif flew between the slips.

But he gradually found his

## SL-NZ match abandoned

SPORTS REPORTER

Heavy rain forced the abandonment of the fourth ODI of the tri-series between New Zealand and Sri Lanka in Dambulla yesterday. It was the reserve day after rain had washed out matchday on the previous day. The two teams had to share the points after two days of rain-marred cricket.

New Zealand had won the toss and put Sri Lanka in to bat on a damp pitch with overcast conditions. But the Lankans were well placed on 203 for 3 in 43.4 overs when rain eventually put paid to any chances of further cricket. Mahela Jayawardene was batting on 59 with Chamara Silva on 41.

The 5th of the series will take place between hosts Sri Lanka and India at the same venue on Sunday.

form and sailed through the so-called 'nervous nineties' with two well-executed cut fours, one square and the other down to third man, against off-spinner Saeed Ajmal.

Cook went to his hundred in a bizarre fashion that said much about the perennial inconsistency of Pakistan's cricket.

He pushed the ball defensively to Asif only for the bowler, trying to lob it back, to send it way over wicketkeeper Kamran Akmal's head for four overthrows.

Not that Cook cared as he celebrated a hundred made in just over three hours off 148 balls with 15 hit boundaries.

But, as if to even things up, Cook fell in tame fashion when a thin legside deflection off debutant left-arm quick Wahab Riaz was caught by Kamran Akmal.

For all Cook's efforts, England were now 156 for three -- just 81 ahead.

England, who after lunch found themselves batting under floodlights, resumed

Friday on six for one, 69 behind, after captain Andrew Strauss had been caught in the slips off left-arm quick Mohammad Aamer late on the second day.

Riaz had taken five wickets during England's first innings 233 but Cook still pulled him for four when he dropped short in his first over on Friday.

However, Ajmal struck first ball on Friday when Anderson was caught behind for 11 to leave England 40 for two.

Poor footwork has plagued Cook for several matches but two textbook cover-driven fours off Aamer, where he got his foot to the pitch of the ball, suggested he was remedying the problem.

**SCORES IN BRIEF**  
ENGLAND: First innings 233 (Prior 84 n o; Riaz 5-63, Asif 3-68)

PAKISTAN: First innings 308 (Azhar 92 n o, Yousuf 56; Swann 4-68)

ENGLAND: Second innings 194 for 3 at tea (Cook 110, Anderson 11, Trott 36 not out, Pietersen 23 not out)



England opener Alastair Cook acknowledges the crowd after reaching hundred on the third day of the third Test against Pakistan at the Brit Oval yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Murali eager to play WC

ANI, Lahore

Legendary Sri Lankan off-spinner Muttiah Muralidaran has expressed his desire of playing in the 2011 World Cup to help his country repeat the success of 1996.

Muralidaran, who retired from Test cricket earlier this month but is available for one dayers, said winning the 2011 World Cup would boost the future of the game in Sri Lanka.

"I am hoping victory in next year's World Cup will not only strengthen our future as a cricketing nation but will also help us produce more world-class cricketers who will go on to entertain the world with their flare, talent, charisma and prowess," The Daily Times quoted Muralidaran, as saying. The leading Test wicket taker also equated his 800-wicket feat in the oldest version of the game to the island nation's 1996 World Cup triumph.

"Obviously winning the tournament in the Indian subcontinent in 1996 is something I rate as highly as my 800 Test wickets and reaching the final in the West Indies three years ago was also by no means a small achievement," said Murali.

Meanwhile, the International Cricket Council (ICC) has announced the schedule for the warm-up games ahead of 2011 World Cup.

All the 14 teams would play two games each from February 12 to 18 before the tournament commences on February 19.

## Division I football

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

Sonali Otit drew with Nabajagan Sangsad 1-1 in the Hafizul Islam Khan Uttu Smriti First Division Football League at the Shaheed Miraz-Tapan Stadium in Manikganj yesterday.

Nigerian recruit Banto took the lead for Sonali Otit in the eighth minute of play only to be equalised by Abbas on twelfth minute of the second half.

Nabajagan Sangsad have one win and two draws in their three matches while Sonali Otit have drawn two of the matches they have played so far.

Tiger Sporting Club and Manikganj City Club will face in today's match.

## Players up for Germany tour

Hockey

SPORTS REPORTER

National hockey players are optimistic about their Germany tour as a part of their preparation for the upcoming Asian Games as the players of the preliminary squad reported to assistant coach Barkatullah Chapal at the Bangladesh Hockey Federation yesterday.

Of the 29-member squad, some 18 players are supposed to the leave for Germany in the last week of this month to play in the German second division in different clubs.

After staying there for almost two months, the national hockey players will return home and travel to Guangzhou, China for the November 12-27 Asian Games.

Before leaving the capital, they will however start practice today as all players excepting Rajon, Limon, Ashiq and Shuvo reported and stars like Jimmy, Biplob, Chayan and Mimo confirmed their presence over the phone.

"If everything goes properly in Germany, I think the players will gather valuable experience and it will help us in the Asian Games," said striker Maksudul Alam Habul, who missed the SA Games but played the Asian Games' qualifying round at home.

As a part of the SA Games, the hockey players were also taken to Europe last year for different clubs. But on their return the players alleged that German coach Gerhard Peter Rach did not take care of them as they had to sweat over managing themselves before each exhibition match since they were scattered across different clubs.

However, it has been learnt that this time ten

of the players will play in a single club and the rest -- two each at two different clubs in Bonn and the remaining four in Austria -- will play in separate clubs.

Gerhard is also planning to bring the players staying in Germany under training for two days a week.

"In our first tour, there was no guidance for us, but this time the coach has ensured the guidance and a fitness coach to be appointed," said Sheikh Mohammad Nannu.

"This time if we get to have practice together and get enough match-practice, I think we can recover from our poor performance of the qualifying round and do better in the finals in China."

Meanwhile, favourites Bangladesh finished fifth ahead of Sri Lanka on better goal difference in the seven-team qualifying round of the Asian Games Qualifiers when they handed a 4-1 defeat to eventual champions Oman in the last match at home in May.

Habul blamed them for that disappointing performance and believed Bangladesh are still better side compared to those qualifying nations and they will play to retain the seventh place in the Games where Bangladesh finished seventh in the 2006 Doha Asian Games.

Bangladesh have been drawn into Pool B along with Pakistan, India, Japan and Hong Kong according to the Asian Hockey Federation website.

Coach Chapal also believed the tour of Germany will increase the individual toughness of the players and help them collectively during the competitive matches.

Some 11 players will stay home and follow the schedules prepared by German coach Gerhard, said Chapal.

## Ali urges for victory

Cricket

AFP, London

Azhar Ali may have been left stranded on 92 not out but he was delighted to have put Pakistan in a position where they could contemplate victory over England in the third Test here at The Oval.

Ali's innings was the cornerstone of Pakistan's 308, and by close of the second day here on Thursday they were 69 runs in front.

Pakistan reduced England to six for one in their second innings after home captain Andrew Strauss was caught in the slips by Yasir Hameed off left-arm quick Mohammad Aamer for four.

Pakistan were well-placed initially thanks to resolute batting, notably a fourth-wicket stand of 69 between recalled former captain Mohammad Yousuf, who made 56 on his return to Test cricket, and Ali.

"I would love to have scored a hundred, but we are in the driving seat just now and will try to keep the pressure on England," Ali said after the Pakistan were left with genuine hope of battling back from 2-0 down in this four-match series.

Yousuf, appearing in his first international match in several months after he was handed an indefinite ban by the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) for his role in captaining the team on their winless tour of Australia, was the epitome of unruffled calm.

Pakistan had been dismissed for record low scores against England of 80 and 72 in crushing

defeats by 354 runs and nine wickets in the first and second Tests respectively.

But the 35-year-old Yousuf, Pakistan's third highest run-scorer, never looked flustered despite having played just a handful of matches during his international 'retirement'.

He found a willing ally in Ali, 10 years his junior, who only made his debut on this tour and whose best score in four previous Tests was the 51 he made in Pakistan's dramatic three-wicket win over Australia at Headingley last month.

But Ali was the first to acknowledge Yousuf's role in his near five-hour innings, which spanned 176 balls and included 14 boundaries.

"Mohammad (Yousuf) was very helpful. When I was in the middle he was guiding me, calming me down, saying: 'Just stay in and the runs will come.'"

Meanwhile Pakistan captain Salman Butt said: "Azhar played wonderfully well."

"We have been talking about Pakistan's future a lot and what I've been telling you guys (the media) was finally on show," added Butt after Ali was left eight runs shy of a century when last man Mohammad Asif holed out against Graeme Swann.

Butt though was equally glad of Yousuf's contribution, which he likened to that of now retired former Pakistan captain Inzamam-ul-Haq.

"He is the most stylish player in the modern era because when he's batting it seems there's a lot of time for the batter, no matter how quick the bowler it looks easy, like Inzamam used to be."

**SPORTS POLL**  
**TODAY'S QUESTION**  
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