

Bramble denies rape claims

Sunderland defender Titus Bramble "strenuously denies any wrongdoing" after being arrested on suspicion of rape, the club's chairman Niall Quinn said. The defender was questioned at a Newcastle police station after he and his brother Tesfaye were held at a city centre hotel. Bramble and his brother were bailed on Wednesday night. They were detained after the alleged rape of a young woman was reported to police in the early hours of Wednesday morning. It is believed the alleged rape happened at the four-star Vermont Hotel, which has an entrance close to bars and nightclubs on Newcastle's



Sylhet: Underachievers eye reversal of fortune

Cricket

MOHAMMAD ISAM

The players don't even remember when Sylhet last won a game of first-class cricket; it has been that long. "We haven't really won anything in the last three years," said a senior player.

"We took lead against Dhaka once and got a few points more than them. That was one of the better days. But we have lost from winning positions several times. It actually has been a bad few years for us," he rued.

For the record, Sylhet have a winless streak of 25 games, spanning almost four years during which they drew eleven games. Sometimes they got close: in 2007, Alok Kapali hit 157 and strode back to the national fold but still Sylhet failed to win. They took a lead against Dhaka sometime ago, but ended up losing, as one player remembers. Worse, they lost all five matches last season.

If Sylhet were a club team, they would have been relegated to the Third Division long ago.

But they will never be relegated from the National Cricket League and in its 12th edition, they are up against defending champions Rajshahi on September 29 at the Shamsul Huda Stadium in Jessore.

So how does a team that has Alok Kapali, Rajin Saleh, Nazmul Hossain, Enamul Haque and Tapash Baisya and previously Hasibul Hossain lose so many games for so long?

Sure Kapali has been an enigma for the national team, but his

class is second to none in the domestic circuit. Rajin has captained Bangladesh in one tournament while Enamul bowled the country to its first-ever Test win.

Pacemen Nazmul and Baisya have given honest performances whenever they have pulled on the Tigers jersey. Hasibul, popularly known as Shanto, was the first player from the region to play Test cricket. There have been others too; Nabil Samad and Imtiaz Hossain have played for the Academy or Bangladesh A teams in recent times.

For several years, individual talent has flown from the Sylhet pipeline but that too has dried up for some time now. Nazmul was the last player from Sylhet to debut for Bangladesh, and that was in 2004-05. No one since has broken through.

The 12th National Cricket League is less than a week away, with the first round starting on September 29 at three venues across the country. The Daily Star Sport are running a series of previews on all six divisional teams that are taking part in the country's lone first-class competition. Tomorrow, the third part of this series will be published.

For the past two decades, a few families have actually provided a lot of players. Rajin Saleh and three of his brothers have played first-class cricket with the youngest one, Rizvi, now set to open the innings for Sylhet. Then there are the Golam and Samad brothers who have served Sylhet in the divisional side.

Having talked to several former and current players from the north-eastern division, there is no doubt that off the field issues have played a major part in Sylhet's continuous decay. Chief among them is the absence of a cricket league in Sylhet for several years. According to Kapali, it is hard to recognise talent without a proper league structure.

"I don't know most of the players from the other districts of Sylhet. We hear about them but since there is no league, we don't get to see how they play. It is important to see how a batsman does under pressure and playing small tournaments will never

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PHOTO: STAR
Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza sends down a delivery while Tigers' new bowling coach Ian Pont (L) looks on during a training session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Hosts eye some solace against India today

SPORTS REPORTER

Having suffered two successive defeats, hosts Bangladesh now take on India in the last match of the AFC U-19 Women's Football Championship qualifiers at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium today.

It is just an academic affair for Bangladesh, who were eliminated from the race after being humiliated by Jordan (6-1) and Iran (6-0), but the hosts want to carry the performance of their match against Iran to the match with India.

"We are not thinking of the outcome, rather our target is to present another good show, like the first half against Iran. It will be a big achievement if we can earn a point against India," said coach Mahmud Alam Babu.

Bangladesh went one goal down at the stroke of half-time before conceding another five in the second half in Wednesday's game.

Babu believed that the girls have been improving day by day.

Today's game will become academic for India too, if favourites Iran, with two wins in as many matches, can earn a point against Jordan in the day's first match putting them through to the second round as Group B champions.

If Iran lose to Jordan and India beat Bangladesh, three teams will have six points on equal and the champions will be decided by goal difference between those teams.

Women's h'ball from today

SPORTS REPORTER

The United Oil Women's Handball League begins today at the Handball Stadium.

Dhaka Mariner Youngs Club take on Jatrabari on the opening day with home minister Sahara Khatun set to declare the nine-team league open.

Bangladesh Handball Federation (BHF) president AKM Nurul Fazle Bulbul disclosed this at a press conference at its office yesterday.

Sponsor Best Lubricant will provide Tk 3 lakh out of the estimated budget of Tk 3.6 lakh while the federation will arrange the rest to make the league a success.

BHF general secretary Azaduzzaman Kohinor, sponsor patron and adviser Sunil Kumar Dey and tournament committee secretary SM Khalekuzzaman Swapan were also present.

Akhtar 'caught tampering' in 5th ODI

INTERNET

There seems no respite for the Pakistan cricket team as after facing spot-fixing allegations, temperamental fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar has landed the scandal-hit side in the middle of a ball-tampering controversy.

Akhtar was caught on camera tampering with the cricket ball during their fifth ODI match against England last night at the Rose Bowl stadium in Southampton, which Pakistan lost by a massive 121 runs.

"In the last game of their acrimonious tour of England at the Rose Bowl last night fast bowler Shoaib Akhtar could be seen apparently running his left thumb along the ball's seam before dropping the ball on the ground and standing on it with his spiked right boot," the Daily Mail reported on Thursday.

"Sportsmail's pictures were taken in the 41st over of England's innings as Shoaib prepared to bowl to Paul Collingwood," it said.

No stranger to controversy, Akhtar was filmed by Sky cameras flicking at the ball with his thumb during an ODI here against England four years ago.

The 35-year-old was let off at that time. His behaviour also came under the scanner when he was accused of tampering with the ball during a Test match in Zimbabwe in late 2002 and was subsequently warned.

For the same offence committed against New Zealand in Sri Lanka, Akhtar was banned for two ODIs and fined 75 per cent of his match fee.

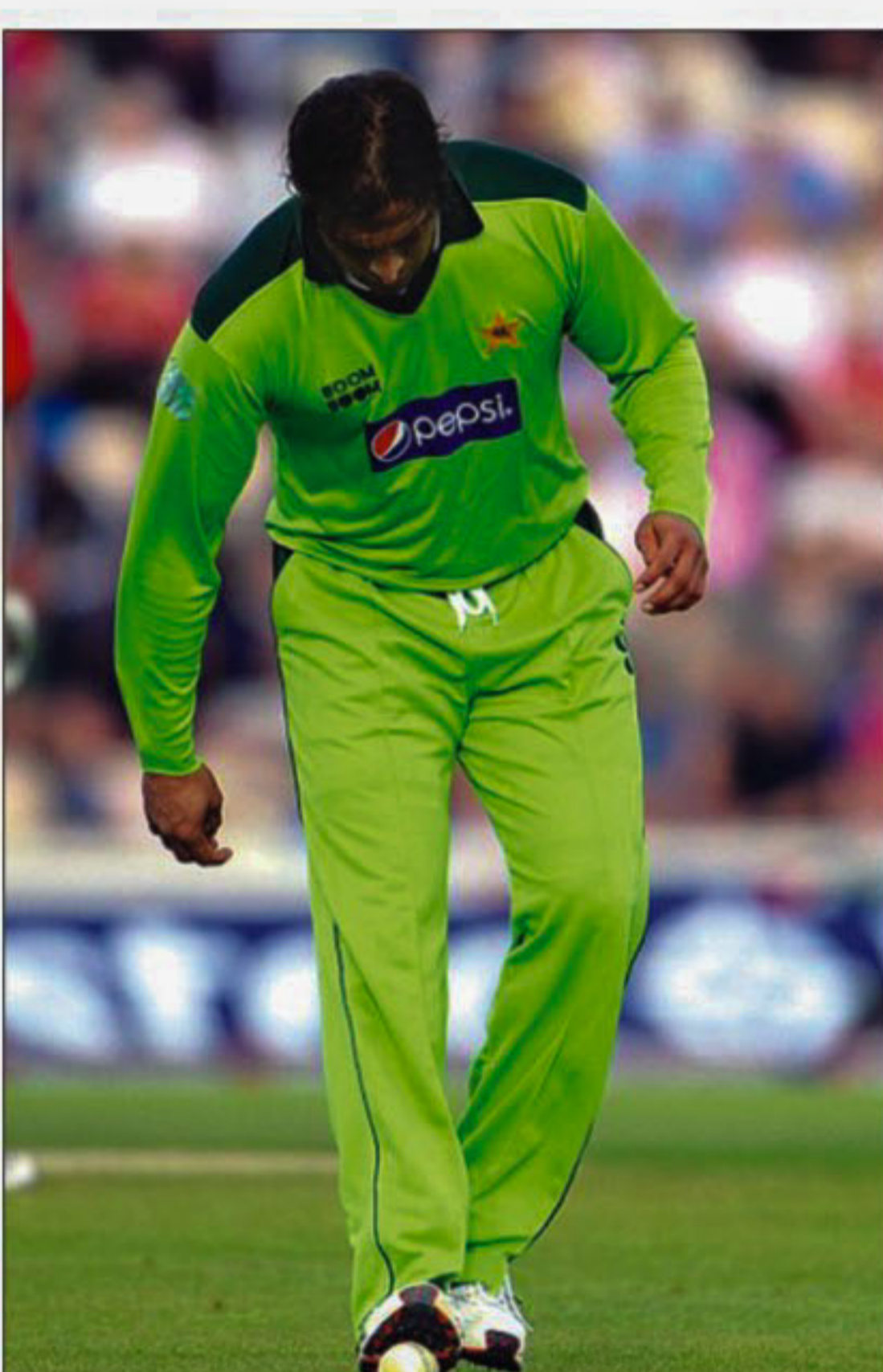


PHOTO: INTERNET
Pakistan speedster Shoaib Akhtar is no stranger to ball tampering. Here the fast bowler is spotted stepping on the ball during the fifth and final one-day international against England at Rose Bowl in Southampton on Wednesday.

Chess Olympiad Men, women teams get better

SPORTS REPORTER

After losing the first round, Bangladesh bounced back in the 39th World Chess Olympiad when both of men's and women's teams won their second round in Khanty-Mansiysk yesterday.

Bangladesh men's team beat Zambia by 2.5-1.5 in the open section as FM Mehdī Hasan Parag beat Bwalya Gillan, Debaraj Chatterjee beat Chumfwa Kelvin, FM Minhazuddin Ahmed Sagar drew against Chumfwa Stanley.

The men's team now have two match points and three game points, according to a press release from the Bangladesh Chess Federation.

In the women's section, Bangladesh defeated Panama 4-0 as WFM Shamima Akter Liza beat Munoz Alba, Sharmin Sultana Shirin beat Gonzalez Yaritheth, WIM Rani Hamid beat Arosemena Nicole and Nazarana Khan Eva beat Foster Yasuri.

Games in fresh crisis

AFP, New Delhi



The embattled supremo of the Delhi Commonwealth Games, Suresh Kalmadi, has vanished from public view with the event plunged into crisis and teams threatening a mass pullout.

Kalmadi, the face of the troubled Games, has not been seen or heard of since revelations broke over the "filthy" state of the athletes' village and a foot-bridge collapsed near the main stadium.

Indian media reported that the 66-year-old member of parliament from the ruling Congress party had been asked to keep a low profile by the government.

Kalmadi, who chairs the Games organising committee, was not part of a high-powered delegation led by cabinet secretary K.M. Chandrasekar, which visited the village Tuesday after delegations complained it was "unfit for human habitation".

It is unusual for the highly visible Kalmadi to stay out of the spotlight but as the October 3 opening ceremony nears and the crisis deepens, he remains sequestered in his office at the plush Games headquarters in central Delhi.

The man who promised the "best ever" Commonwealth Games and an athletes village "better" than the one at the Beijing Olympics initially had his wings clipped in mid-August.

At that time, with the Games organisation already facing mounting criticism, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh gave overriding powers to a group of ministers to oversee the preparations.

The move followed a report by the Central Vigilance Commission on rampant corruption, although Kalmadi himself was not personally implicated.

Kalmadi told reporters earlier this month that he was willing to face any criticism or government inquiry as long as the Games went off well.

"I don't mind people blaming me," he said. "But once the Games are over, I hope the same people would give me the credit."

Few expect the former air force pilot, who fought in two wars against Pakistan in 1965 and 1971, to survive on the Indian sports scene after the Games.

Kalmadi, who headed the Athletics Federation of India from 1989 to 2006, has served as president of the Indian Olympic Association since 1996.

He has already been targeted by the sports ministry, which has ruled that the country's top officials cannot remain in their post for more than 12 years or beyond the age of 70.

"These guidelines are uncalled for," a defiant Kalmadi said. "If there had been a dialogue, we could have probably accepted that. But this diktat we cannot follow."

Former Indian Olympians, headed by ex-hockey captain Pargat Singh, wrote to the International Olympic Committee in June describing Kalmadi as a "serious threat to the very foundation of the values of sports".

"During the last few decades, some people have been using sports as a vehicle to gain political power and satisfy their greed, keeping sportspersons as mere bystanders," the letter said.

"Indian sports has become a vehicle for Kalmadi's power and glory."

Adamant Mahmud steps down

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Khaled Mahmud ultimately stuck to his decision of stepping down from the duty of assistant coach of the national cricket team.

"I gave my final decision to the board today as it's not possible for me right now to continue my job as assistant coach or any other position in the board as an employee. I'm not going to the training from tomorrow," informed Khaled Mahmud yesterday. He is all set to become Abahani coach for the season.

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) also accepted his resignation after they failed to convince the former national skipper to change the decision.

"The technical committee met today [Thursday] to discuss the issue and has accepted his resignation letter. Right at the moment, we are not thinking about a replacement in the national team. We thought it would not be a problem for the team," said BCB's media committee chairman Jalal Yunus, who is also a member of the technical committee.

"We tried our best to change his decision. Cricket operations committee chairman (Enayet Hossain Siraj) and our CEO (Manzur Ahmed) have talked with him but he (Khaled Mahmud) was adamant with his decision.

"He had made some 'unacceptable' comments against the board but still we felt that he can continue his job because he has got the potential," said Jalal.

Though Mahmud had tendered his resignation saying that he was not enjoying his job, the reason behind the scene was that he has a lot of complain against head coach Jamie Siddons.

"We assured him many things but he was not ready to be convinced by our promises," said Yunus.

Mahmud however said that he has no complain against the board.

"What I felt that it would not be a wise decision for me to change my mind. I have to look at my career and family too. I have no complain against the board because I will be happy if I can be involved in any board activities in the future. One thing is that I want to leave with honour," said Mahmud.

"Right now, I want to concentrate on my business as well as club coaching," he added.

Yunus, who is also vice-chairman of the Abahani's cricket committee, said that it would not be a problem for Mahmud to take the Dhanmondi outfit's charge if he continues as an assistant coach of the national team.

"National and club duties are totally different things. Yes, he has made a deal with Abahani for the coming season. It may have been possible for him to do both the duties. Anyway we can't impose anything on him," said Jalal.

Akbar lands for Abahani today

SPORTS REPORTER

Iranian coach Ali Akbar is scheduled to arrive here this morning to take charge of three-time Bangladesh League champions Abahani for the upcoming season.

Akbar, an AFC instructor and who has experience to guide an Iranian professional football club, is expected to put pen to paper for six months, said manager Satyajit Das Rupa adding that they just want to him to guide the teams in the right way.

Last season, Argentine trainer Diego Alvaro worked with the Sky Blues after his

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DRU football

SPORTS REPORTER

Daily Janakantha and Naya Diganta won their respective matches in the DRU-Rapid Securities Media Football Tournament at the Handball Stadium yesterday.

Janakantha crushed Radio Today 4-0 while Naya Diganta beat ATN News 2-0.

In the day's other matches, ATN Bangla played out a 1-1 draw against Bhorer Kaghaj while Daily Ittefaq drew 1-1 against Banglanews24.

SHEIKH JAMAL DHANMONDI CLUB New name, new goal

SPORTS REPORTER

Despite having roped in 16 national footballers, newcomers Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club reserve enough admiration for two traditional foes Abahani and Mohammedan in the upcoming season that is likely to get underway on October 7 through the Federation Cup qualifiers.

Club president Manzur Kader, having expressed his respect for the country's two powerhouses at a press briefing, said that jerseys of Abahani and Mohammedan had something special to those.

"Apart from them, Muktijoddha Sangsad and Sheikh Russel KC have also formed good sides and we will take each of our opponents seriously," added Kader, who also once was an official of Abahani and Muktijoddha Sangsad.

Dhanmondi Club started to bring star footballers like Aminul Haque, Zahid Hasan Emily, Enamul Haq, Wali Faisal, Mohammad Sujjan, Mamunul Islam, Atiqur Rahman Mishu, Zahid Hossain, Nasiruddin, Komol,

Shahed under one umbrella during the World Cup and have completed their mission much before the start of the players' transfer. And the club yesterday organised a function at the Gulshan Club to introduce its footballers, cricketers for the First Division and officials to the media.

Kader also promised not to take part in any 'fixed match' and give away any match to any team in the professional football league as the club itself wanted to emerge cham-

pions playing fair.

Explaining the reasons behind changing the club's name, Kader said that the club had a glorious history since starting its journey in 1962 with Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman as its chief patron and once his son Sheikh Kamal was the president.

"But later the club could not keep its momentum going due to lack of patrons and some veteran and optimistic members of the club came

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PHOTO: STAR
President of Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club Manzur Kader (2nd from L) addresses a press briefing at the Gulshan Club yesterday.

SPORTS POLL
TODAY'S QUESTION
What should Khaled Mahmud do?
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