

Star SPORT

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Azarenka needs her coffee

Third seed Victoria Azarenka could have been forgiven for a slow start after missing her morning coffee. In the event, she dispatched Britain's Heather Watson for the loss of just one game on Monday. "Actually, I didn't get my coffee in the morning today, so I was really unhappy," she laughed. "It was so early and I wanted to come play a little bit longer on centre court. Everything was closed. I said, 'Oh, my God, I need my coffee.' So I kept trying to open my eyes without it and it was not working."

- AFP



Biman won't fly cricketers

The cash-strapped airliner also shutting down its table tennis team

SHARIFUL ISLAM

The board of Biman Bangladesh Airlines has decided to scrap two of its four sports teams including cricket after a primary investigation found irregularities regarding free tickets issued to players.

"We've stopped the teams [cricket and table tennis] as now we cannot afford to bear the expenses," Biman managing director Air Commodore (retd) Zakiul Islam told The Daily Star last week.

Although the Biman MD attributed cash crisis for the closure of two sporting outfits, the board meeting on January 3 adopted the resolution after it was revealed that 239 highly-demanded tickets were issued to the players free of charge, flaunting its rules.

The meeting also decided to continue with running badminton and chess with only cash incentives and the provision must be included in the annual budget. Besides, the board has also decided not to issue free tickets to the players anymore.

The decision means that the country's sports lovers will no longer see Biman, which has been patronising sports since 1975 as part of its corporate social responsibility, from next season playing cricket and table tennis.

It will also end Biman's long and glorious association with the two games where it was not just among the top teams but also pro-

vided employment to around 25 cricketers and a few table-tennis players, a policy that is badly needed for the development of sports in the country. For the record, Biman are six-time Dhaka Premier League champions and the winners of the 2000-01 National Cricket League. Besides, they have won the national table tennis title for a record 15 times.

The board took the harsh decision after a primary investigation revealed that all 239 free tickets Biman issued to players and other

"We've stopped the teams [cricket and table tennis] as now we cannot afford to bear the

officials of the four teams were for the Dhaka-Jeddah route following an approval from its managing director, though there was an earlier decision not to issue free tickets for popular routes like Dhaka-Jeddah and Dhaka-London.

It was gathered that of the 239 tickets issued in 2010, the Biman Sports Committee disbursed 161 for cricket, 35 for badminton, 21 for table tennis and 22 for chess.

It was learnt that those free return tickets were sold with the consent of the players by a vested group only at Tk 40,000 each, to a number of travel agents who sold those tickets at over Tk 1.08 lakh each during the demanding Hajj season last year.

And by accommodating those tickets on Hajj flights, Biman was deprived of a huge revenue of about Tk 2.58 crore.

Nurul Islam, proprietor of Shoring Travels, bought 91 of those tickets last year.

"I bought each ticket at Tk 40,000 in the beginning of the year and sold those at Tk 68,000 to Tk 69,000 each," said the travel agent. Asked why he sold those tickets at such a low price, he said that people didn't want to buy free tickets as they faced undue questions and harassment at Saudi Arabian airports.

The national flag carrier has been issuing transferable free tickets to the players as part of payment since 1981 in an effort to reduce direct pressure on its funds. It was initially hailed as an effective innovative idea with tickets being issued for less popular destinations.

But sources close to Biman said that a vested group on its sports committee itself in conjunction with travel agents worked out a formula of converting a less-priced ticket for a player into a high-priced one by change of

hands.

Sources have added that Ali Ahsan Babu, now a general manager of Biman, is the point man when it comes to free tickets for players. Joining the national airliner in 1988-89 as a cricket player, Babu has also served as the cricket team manager for a long time after retiring from the game. Even during the several years he was stationed in Dubai, he used to call the shots, claimed the sources, adding that Babu, who has returned to Dhaka two years ago, might have played a big role in issuing the 239 tickets.

When contacted, Babu declined to comment on the matter.

Though the tickets were meant for the players, those were never handed over to them.

Two officials from Biman cricket and table tennis teams on Saturday claimed to The Daily Star that when they form teams, they sign contracts with players mentioning how much they will get in cash and how many free tickets.

"As it is not possible for the players to sell tickets, they want the money so we [team managers] help them sell those tickets to travel agents in advance less than half of the original price of each ticket in the beginning of the season," they univocally said.

The cricket team official

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Bonanza awaits

Players' auction today

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh cricket will step into a new era today when 197 cricketers will go under the hammer in the players' auction for the money-spinning Bangladesh Premier League.

The open bidding, which will be only the second players' auction in cricket after the Indian Premier League and conducted by Cyrus Madan (a horse-racing expert), will take place behind closed doors from 10.30am at the Radisson Hotel in the city.

The BCB's new venture is going to change the fortunes of a handful of local players and the prospect of Chris Gayle, Shahid Afridi and Kieron Pollard being fought for by the six franchises, which can spend up to \$2 million, could bring the much-needed enthusiasm to the mega event.

The BPL governing council released a list of 111 international and 86 local players for the auction but though they are not only the big names in the world cricket, Afridi, Pollard, Dwayne Bravo and Abdul Razzaq are big Twenty20 players without any doubt and will be up for auction from \$100,000. Some of the other stars that will be pedalled are Scott Styris, Shoaib Malik, Chaminda Vaas, Muttiah Muralidaran, Ajantha Mendis and Azhar Mahmood, while Chris Gayle, Dirk

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Sk Russel prevail in exciting match

SPORTS REPORTER



Sheikh Russel KC kept their hundred percent winning record intact as they advanced to the semifinals of the Grameenphone Federation Cup with a 4-2 win over Arambagh KS in the last quarterfinal at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The final last eight match did not have the same end-to-end pulsating feel of the Abahani-Sheikh Jamal match-up the day before but there were enough nerve-wrecking moments in store to make it an interesting encounter.

The game started with a bang as Sheikh Russel scored twice within the first four minutes to give rise to speculations about a rout. But Arambagh KS showed plenty of fighting spirit to draw level before the break.

Russel, however, ultimately proved too strong and added two more goals in the second half to seal their progress. It is the maiden semifinal berth for Sheikh Russel since their first appearance in top-level football in 2003-04 and they will now face Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club in Saturday's semifinal.

Sheikh Russel's seized the initiative right

from the start as striker Anwar Hossain headed in a Faisal Mahmud corner at the near post. And they doubled the lead in the fourth minute through a penalty after their Nigerian Earnest Siankam Emako was bought down inside the box, and picked up and dusted himself off to emphatically crash home.

But while that might have signalled the end for many a team, Arambagh KS showed plenty of character to come back due to a collective effort spearheaded by striking duo Eleta Kingsley and Joel who both scored to bring the tie level before half-time.

With Sheikh Russel also losing forward Emako with injury, Arambagh came into the second half possessed and nearly took the lead as Khalil hit the woodwork early on.

The miss seemed to take out a lot from Arambagh and Sheikh Russel capitalised in the 52nd minute with a goal from winger Faisal Mahmud who also injured himself in the process of scoring the goal.

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Sheikh Russel's Nigerian striker Joel Uzomefun (C) takes off in celebration after scoring his team's second goal during their Grameenphone Federation Cup quarterfinal victory over Arambagh at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

30 players do the trick!

Bangladesh A win 3-2 as Lions reduce margin



Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

The much-talked about one-day series between Bangladesh A and England Lions ended yesterday with the visitors earning a consolation victory by six wickets at the Sylhet Divisional Stadium.

The home side, despite changing the squad five times in as many matches and using a whopping 30 cricketers, prevailed 3-2 after winning two matches in Chittagong and the crucial fourth one-dayer by six wickets.

During the final game, the home side however suffered an early morning collapse which could have triggered a below-100 score but thanks to a staunch rearguard action from the tail, chiefly Noor Hossain, the match petered into a respectable affair.

Batting first after being put in, the A team's top-order were blown to bits by Jack Brooks, the Northamptonshire paceman. The 27-year-old took care of the top three -- Imrul Kayes,

Nasiruddin Faruque and Junaed Siddiqui -- by the eighth over of the innings. Soon, the score slipped to 75 for seven before Noor, who made 38 off 28 balls with three boundaries and a couple of sixes, added 55 for the eighth

wicket with Forhad Reza, who contributed with 23 runs.

Apart from Brooks's three, left-arm spinner Simon Kerrigan and part-timer Joe Root picked up two each.

Forhad then picked up Root for a

duck but there wasn't a similar collapse by the visitors who had skipper James Taylor to thank. The diminutive right-hander struck four boundaries in his stabilising unbeaten 65 off 110 balls. He added 68 for the fourth wicket with Jonny Bairstow before completing the chase through a 30-run stand with Jos Buttler who struck a couple of sixes and a boundary in his 21-ball 27.

For the home side, Forhad, Mosharraf Hossain, Sohag Gazi and Noor Hossain took one each.

The first Twenty20 between the two sides will be held on January 22 at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Dhaka.

SCORES IN BRIEF

BANGLADESH A: 152 all out in 44.1 overs (Noor 38, Forhad 23, Naem 16; Brooks 3-35, Kerrigan 2-45, Root 2-10). **ENGLAND LIONS:** 158-4 in 37.5 overs (Taylor 65 not out, Bairstow 33, Buttler 27 not out; Forhad 1-4, Mosharraf 1-26, Sohag 1-33, Noor 1-39).

Result: England Lions won by six wickets; Bangladesh A win 5-match series 3-2.



The victorious Bangladesh A team, who completed a 3-2 series victory over the visiting England Lions, pose with chief guest Finance Minister Abul Mal Abdul Muhith (C) after the fifth one-dayer at the Sylhet Divisional Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: BCB

Jamal storms to 3-shot lead

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh's Jamal Hossain Mollah stormed into a three-stroke lead at the end of round two of the American Express Bangladesh Golf Open with a sublime seven under 65 at the Kurmitola Golf Club yesterday. Jamal's total stands at eight under 136 at the halfway stage. Round one leader Siddikur Rahman slipped to joint second, along with India's R Murthy, Vikrant Chopra and Vijay Kumar at five under 139, after firing a 73 in round two. The cut was made at nine over 153 with fifty professionals and one amateur making it to the last two stages.

Jamal had a slow start to the day as he bogeyed the 10th hole before recovering with birdies on the 12th and 13th. Mollah dropped his second bogey on the 15th but the birdie on the 17th meant he made the turn at one under.

However, the 27-year-old turned on the heat on his second nine as he went on a birdie-hunting spree, firing birdies on the first, third, fourth, fifth and seventh and ninth.

"I excelled with the wedges today as I hit it extremely close on a number of occasions. I also drove well and found the centre of the fairway quite often. I am thrilled to have made nine birdies today. I'll look to target a total score of 20 under this week," said a satisfied Jamal.

Meanwhile, overnight joint leader Siddikur slipped to joint second place after he fired a one over 73 with three birdies and four bogeys. India's Feroz Ali Mollah, the other overnight

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PCB COO's surprise visit

SPORTS REPORTER

Subhan Ahmed, the chief operations officer of the Pakistan Cricket Board, said yesterday that they have asked the International Cricket Council to send a security team to Pakistan, but believed that a lack of response is a good sign for the proposed tour by Bangladesh in April.

"We have informed ICC about Bangladesh's tour of Pakistan in April and have asked them to send their security team to visit Pakistan," he told reporters at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

"They haven't come back to us with any observation which basically means that they have no concerns with it. The decision of bilateral tours depends on the decision of two boards. So if Bangladesh and Pakistan Cricket Board are fine with it, ICC will have no issue," said Subhan.

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