

Star SPORT

DHAKA FRIDAY MARCH

Pizarro banned for slapping

Peru striker Claudio Pizarro will miss Werder Bremen's visit to German league leaders Borussia Dortmund on Saturday after being banned for two games for slapping an opponent during a Bundesliga game. The German Football Federation (DFB) imposed the ban after their disciplinary committee investigated Pizarro's slap on Hanover defender Emanuel Pogatzetz during Bremen's 3-0 victory last Sunday. Referee Christian Dingert missed the incident early in the second half, but television replays clearly showed the Peruvian slapping Austria defender



Pakistan almost in final

SPORTS REPORTER



Pakistan put one foot in the final of the Asia Cup after their 6-wicket win over Sri Lanka at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. There was a bonus point earned too as they reached the 189-run target in 39.5 overs.

The result also puts the Lankans in a very difficult position as this was their second successive defeat after the 50-run loss to India. Pakistan are at the other higher end of the scale with their second win.

This was all put in place through Pakistan's new-found discipline, both with bat and the ball. First it was Aizaz Cheema's two-wicket burst that got Pakistan going after Tilakkaratne Dilshan made a blistering start with four boundaries. But Cheema removed the openers and Younis Khan took Dinesh Chandimal out of the equation with a brilliant catch at slip.

Kumar Sangakkara was at the other end watching this mayhem, but stayed calm to put together a 96-run fifth wicket stand with Upul Tharanga, who hit his third fifty as a No 6 batsman. The senior pro too hammered a half-century, finishing with 71 off 92 balls with the help of four boundaries and a six, his 71st half-century in this format.

Cheema took the wicket of Sangakkara to pick up his second four-wicket haul in ODI cricket but one would imagine that without

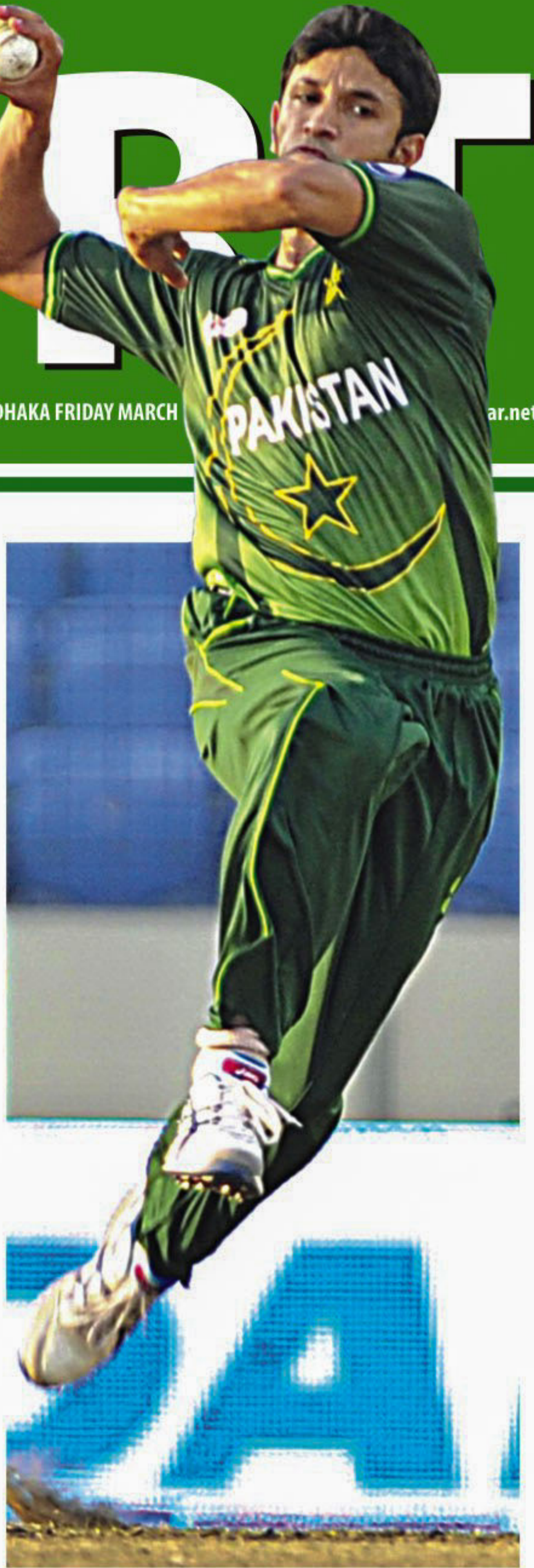
the contribution of Saeed Ajmal, the Lankans could have made a comeback. But it was the off-spinner's doosra that stopped the threatening stand when it went through Tharanga's prolonged defenses after he had completed a 25th ODI fifty. The dangerous Farveez Maharoof too was an Ajmal victim before he rounded off the Sri Lankan innings in the 46th over.

As the chase began, Lasith Malinga and Nuwan Kulasekara kept Nasir Jamshed and Mohammad Hafeez honest. Suranga Lakmal reaped their rewards by picking up the left-handed opener and Younis while leggie Seekugge Prasanna taking the wicket of Hafeez to reduce them to 33 for three in the thirteenth over.

But Misbah Ul Haq and Umar Akmal stabilized the innings as they slowly rebuilt the chase. They put together 152 runs for the fourth wicket with both batsmen reaching half-centuries, though of contrasting nature.

Misbah was at his best, batting with a lot of caution and letting the younger man take more of the attack. Akmal batted properly for most of the innings, hammering the loose balls available at every opportunity.

With four runs required for victory, Akmal got out for 77 off 72 balls with the help of seven fours and two sixes. The Pakistan skipper was unbeaten on 72 off 93 balls with nine boundaries and a six as Hammad Azam finished up the win with a brash hit to the long-off fence.



Aizaz Cheema's fantastic opening spell enabled Pakistan to restrict Sri Lanka to a modest total in their Asia Cup match at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Focus on good cricket

Tigers' India test today

BISHWAJIT ROY



Virender Sehwag was the slayer when last these two teams met at the very same venue in Mirpur in the 2011 World Cup opener. The dashing right-hander is not here this time but India still have enough firepower in their arsenal to demoralise any attack, especially when the pitches at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium are tailor-made for the batsmen.

India already flexed their considerable muscles in the first game against Sri Lanka riding on the exploits of Gautam Gambhir and Virat Kohli, whose unbeaten hundred was overshadowed by his senior (Virender Sehwag) partner's mesmerising effort in the World Cup match. And not to forget, master batsman Sachin Tendulkar is waiting on a monumental landmark, and without any doubt the conditions are perfect for him to end the long wait for the hundredth international hundred.

So in reality, only a disciplined effort in both the bowling and batting departments from Mushfiqur Rahim's men can ensure a good match today. There is however a big difference between today and the World Cup encounter, as there is little hype and expectation surrounding today's Asia Cup battle

compared to that match more than a year ago as many had been expecting a win against a formidable India after Bangladesh's victory in the 2007 World Cup. That may have been the reason Bangladesh skipper Mushfiqur toned down his responses while talking to the reporters in the pre-match press conference yesterday; even though they have won only two of their 23 clashes against India, the Tigers have built

a reputation of playing well against their neighbours. "The win or loss doesn't matter too much if you consider our strength as a team; rather the important thing is whether we can play consistently good cricket against the big opponents like India," observed Mushfiqur.

It was clearly evident that the little man was concerned with the strong Indian batting line-up rather than their bowling, but he was however excited with the fact that Bangladesh have generally put up a good fight against India in previous encounters.

"What I personally feel is that India's bowling is not as strong as Pakistan's and Sri Lanka's, so it gives us some sort of confidence. And another thing is that our performance against India has not been bad at all, we always got a good start against them," explained Mushfiqur recalling the good

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Bangladesh captain Mushfiqur Rahim speaks to reporters ahead of the Tigers' Asia Cup match against India.

PHOTO: STAR

PAK-SL SCOREBOARD

SRI LANKA				
Jayawardene c Hafeez b Cheema	12			
Dilshan c Ajmal b Cheema	20			
Sangakkara b Cheema	71			
Chandimal c Younis b Gul	0			
Thirimanne c Akmal b Azam	7			
Tharanga b Ajmal	57			
Maharoof c Misbah b Ajmal	2			
Kulasekara c Sarfraz b Gul	4			
Prasanna not out	5			
Malinga b Cheema	1			
Lakmal c Jamshed b Ajmal	0			
Extras: (lb-5, w-4)	9			
Total: (All out in 45.4 overs)	188			
Fall of wickets: 1-33, 2-43, 3-47, 4-65, 5-161, 6-165, 7-172, 8-183, 9-187, 10-188.				

PAKISTAN				
Hafeez c Chandimal b Prasanna	11			
Jamshed c Tharanga b Lakmal	18			
Younis c Maharoof b Lakmal	2			
Misbah not out	72			
Akmal c Tharanga b Maharoof	77			
Azam not out	4			
Extras: (lb-1, nb-2, w-2)	5			
Total: (For four wickets in 39.5 overs)	189			
Did not bat: Afridi, Sarfraz, Gul, Ajmal, Cheema.				
Fall of wickets: 1-29, 2-31, 3-33, 4-185.				

Bowler				
Gul	8	1	20	2
Cheema	9	0	43	4
Hafeez	10	0	40	0
Azam	4	0	21	1
Ajmal	8.4	1	27	3
Afridi	6	0	32	0

Shakib herding the flock

MOHAMMAD ISAM



Shakib Al Hasan must be enjoying cricket these days, that is, top-quality cricket against A-class opposition. It presents him with a different challenge every game in a variety of situations one of which is coming up today in Bangladesh's second game in the Asia Cup against India.

After a valiant half-century against Pakistan, it is now clear that Shakib has to do it all on his own. Be it rescuing the team from a top-order collapse, nurturing a good start from the top-order, or shepherding the lower-order in chase, it has to be Shakib at the other end these days. With the ball in hand, Shakib comes on first-change to get the team a breakthrough. He's also the partnership-breaker, Powerplay bowler and slog stopper. He is both the team's stock bowler and its shock bowler.

Against Mahendra Singh Dhoni's India, Shakib can expect a true test of his bowling skills, much of which will have to come to his rescue to stop an onslaught or break a long partnership. His batting though should thrive against a low-pace attack that will use only one quality spinner. With the quality of the wicket at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium during this tournament, another important innings with the bat and an indis-

pensable display with the ball can be expected.

Among the top teams, Shakib averages the highest against India (36.42 in seven innings) with four fifties -- slightly better than his overall batting average.

Watching Shakib often reminds one of a statement made by Graham Gooch many moons ago about the great New Zealand all-rounder Richard Hadlee. Twenty-five years ago, the former England captain had remarked that playing against New Zealand in those days was "like the World XI at one end, and Ilford Second XI at the other". The Bangladesh bowlers may complain with the parallel drawn here but worryingly, the batsmen increasingly look too dependent on Shakib.

Teammates of world-class all-rounders from the yesteryears have often commented that they feed off the confidence of greats like Hadlee, Imran Khan or Kapil Dev; it doesn't make the other players of any lesser class but some folks are made of a different fabric.

The first time Shakib played against India was during the Port-of-Spain win during the 2007 World Cup. He went wicketless that day but hit an underrated half-century. Since Shakib bowls during every crucial juncture, it is

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A down to earth Kumar

SPORTS REPORTER

Vinay Kumar wouldn't be expected to make big statements and it's not just because of his position as the second least experienced seamer in the Indian team, or due to his name (which means down to earth in Bangla).

More than his international record, it is his repertoire with the ball that tells of his introvert nature.

When asked yesterday to give his response to a Mushfiqur Rahim comment about India's bowling, Kumar resorted to the most used one-liner. "It depends on each individual. They can say whatever they feel. For me, it's a very good bowling attack," he said during the pre-match press conference at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

But when it comes to his bowling and conditions, the 28-year-old was more than accommodating, saying

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Tamim Iqbal (R) and Mashrafe Bin Mortaza have a history of doing well against India. Will they be able to keep up their good work against the world champions in a crucial Asia Cup match today?

'Bowlers gave us edge'

SAKEB SUBHAN



Even though it was skipper Misbah Ul Haq and Umar Akmal who cornered the glory as Pakistan vanquished Sri Lanka by six wickets with 10.3 overs to spare, the credit for their second Asia Cup win at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday must go to the bowlers.

Pakistan had the match half in the bag when they dismissed Sri Lanka for a sub-par 188 courtesy of a fine all-round bowling display, especially from pacer Aizaz Cheema and off-spinner Saeed Ajmal, who claimed four and three wickets respectively. Then it was a strong show from Misbah and Akmal, who rescued the team from the difficulty of 33 for three through a 152-run fourth-wicket partnership that sealed the deal.

"The bowlers gave us the edge, especially getting them out for 188," said a relaxed Misbah after the match. "Then we struggled a little bit at the top, losing three early wickets. They were in the hunt but I think that partnership [between him and Akmal] really brought us back into the game."

The big win against a top side after the failures in the recent ODI series against England pleased the Pakistan captain, particularly the resurgence in the middle order. "It was a much-needed performance by the middle order, especially me and Umar Akmal. Most of our batsmen struggled through the England series. We could not finish games off, so I think this performance

is really a confidence builder for us and we needed that very much," said the Pakistan captain, who scored an unbeaten 72 in Pakistan's successful chase, while his partner Akmal lashed a 77 off 72 balls.

The win takes Pakistan almost to the final and even more importantly for an Asian cricket tournament, sets up the prospect of two India-Pakistan matches in a matter of days, after the great arch-rivals last met in the World Cup semifinal more than a year ago. Questions were coming thick and fast at the Pakistan skipper regarding the marquee encounter, and that forced the usually stone-faced Misbah to crack a smile.

"Are you trying to put additional pressure on me?" Misbah asked with a smile, but said that the intensity won't be diminished between the great rivals just because they may be playing a dress rehearsal for the finals on Sunday. "It is an important match for both teams, even if it is a friendly both teams will try their hardest to win. We should play as usual and focus on the next match. That is the way forward."

Mahela Jayawardene, the Sri Lanka skipper, was obviously disappointed with his team's performance and said that it was a batting failure that cost them the game.

"It was pretty obvious, [the problem lay] with the bat. When you win the toss and bat first the challenge is to get a good score on the board that your bowlers can bowl at," Jayawardene said. "I think the par score on this pitch is 250, and we didn't get anywhere near that. It is tough to then come back and do something magical."

Big clash as league resumes today

SPORTS REPORTER



After a two-day gap, the Grameenphone Bangladesh Premier League resumes today at the Bangabandhu National Stadium with the Dhanmondi derby between holders Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club and three-time champions Abahani Ltd.

Defending champions Sheikh Jamal, who have been struggling in the professional football league since the season's curtain-raising Federation Cup triumph after dropping 11 points in six matches, will be looking forward to taming three-time champions Abahani in a bid to return to the title race.

Nevertheless, the task will be a tough one for Sheikh Jamal as Abahani, who are in the second position with 14 points from six

matches, are the lone unbeaten side in the league and are aiming to topple leaders Muktijoddha Sangsad.

"To recover the points we lost in the past as well as to keep the image of the club intact, a victory against Abahani is very important for us and we will go there for a win," said Sheikh Jamal coach Abu Yousuf adding that he would miss two key players in winger Femi Orunmimi for suspension and goalkeeper Aminul Haq, who is outside the country.

The return of Awudu Ibrahim will boost the confidence of Abahani but they may miss the service of speedy winger Zahdi Hasan, who is nursing an injury.

"Every match is important and we see no alternative but to beat Sheikh Jamal if we want to go top of the table," said Abahani manager Sattayjit Das Rupu.

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