

Manmohan leads Sachin tribute

Cricket

AFP, New Delhi

India's prime minister Friday led the tributes to batting superstar Sachin Tendulkar who became the first player in cricketing history to score 100 international centuries.

"I join the nation in congratulating Sachin Tendulkar on his making history -- a hundred centuries. He has made India proud," Manmohan Singh said in a press release.

"Tendulkar's long career has been a triumph of class, character and courage. I wish him many more innings and feats to continue inspiring the youth," added the statement from the premier.

Tendulkar, who turns 39 next month, achieved the milestone with his 49th one-day century in an Asia Cup match against Bangladesh at the Sher-e-Bangla stadium in Dhaka. He has 51 Test hundreds.

Millions of fans in India and across the cricketing world had endured an anxious year-long wait for the great moment, with Tendulkar seeming permanently stuck on a tally of 99 centuries.

"Well played Sachin the little master...!!!" former England all-rounder Ian Botham posted on Twitter.

The micro-blogging site was flooded with congratulatory messages that poured in from fans and officials the world over immediately after the "Master Blaster" reached the 100-run mark.

Former England skipper Nasser Hussain, who was in New Delhi on Friday, told reporters that Tendulkar had secured his place at the top of the all-time list.

"Sir Donald Bradman was great but for

me the greatest batsman to have ever played the game is Sachin Tendulkar," Hussain said.

Bollywood stars were also quick to add their tributes.

"India breathes normally ...!! Sachin completes an incredible feat !! A hundred 100's .. Never done before, perhaps never after," film legend Amitabh Bachchan posted on his Twitter feed.

"Finally he did it. Sachin creates history in world cricket! Congrats to Sachin Hundredkar. Respect," tweeted fellow actor Akshay Kumar.

International Cricket Council president Haroon Lorgat hailed Tendulkar as a true role model as he lauded his "magnificent" feat.

"He is a marvel to cricket lovers around the world and with an array of batting records, Sachin is a true role model who will undoubtedly hold a special place in cricket's history," Lorgat said in a statement.

Perhaps the best of tributes was from Rameez Raja, former Pakistan batsman who was commentating on the match. Rameez told reporters from outside the commentary box:

"Sport transcends boundaries. We [Pakistanis] can own Sachin as much as India owns India, and that is the beauty of the sport. Of course, Pakistanis also look up to him because he has been such a great ambassador for the sport. As I said, there are no boundaries, for instance, when you are listening to music or watching sport. You watch it for the fun of it; you watch it for what sportsmen are. They are the most neutral people in the world. And that's the great story about Sachin Tendulkar."



PHOTO: AFP

A PROUD MENTOR: Ramakant Achrekar, the coach of India's batting genius Sachin Tendulkar, watches his disciple score the 100th international century, at his Mumbai home yesterday.

Little known facts

REUTERS, New Delhi

* Tendulkar has 13 coins from his coach Ramakant Achrekar. He would win a coin if he could get through an entire session of nets without being dismissed.

* Tendulkar holds the unique distinction of scoring a century on debut in Ranji Trophy, Irani Trophy and Duleep Trophy.

* Tendulkar was a ball boy during the 1987 semifinal between India and

England.

* There are two wards in New Delhi's Tihar Jail, one named after Tendulkar and another after Vinod Kambli -- the duo shared a 664-run unbroken partnership in a school match.

* Tendulkar was the first player to be given out by the third umpire in an international game.

* Tendulkar was the first individual without an aviation background to be awarded the honorary rank of Group Captain by the Indian Air Force.

TOP 5 INTERNATIONAL CENTURY-MAKERS

- 100 - Sachin Tendulkar
- 71 - Ricky Ponting
- 59 - Jacques Kallis
- 53 - Brian Lara (WIS)
- 48 - Rahul Dravid (IND)
- 45 - Mahela Jayawardene

Anelka scores in debut

AFP, Beijing

Siddikur on 27th

Golf

SPORTS REPORTER

French striker Nicolas Anelka scored in his highly-anticipated debut in the Chinese Super League Friday but was powerless to prevent new club Shanghai Shenhua losing 3-2 to fierce rivals Beijing Guoan.

The former Arsenal and Chelsea striker equalized for Shenhua to make it 2-2 with a simple tap midway through the second half after a defensive lapse from Beijing -- raising hopes of a victory in a match dubbed the "China Derby".

The capital side had gone two goals ahead thanks to efforts from Piao Cheng and Portuguese midfielder Manu.

Abahani on top

SPORTS REPORTER

Abahani returned to the top of the Grameenphone Bangladesh Premier League table by defeating defending champions Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club 2-1 at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. Nigerian forward Lucky Paul Otofe gave Abahani an eighth minute lead while Ghanaian midfielder Awudu Ibrahim doubled the lead in the 66th minute before Atique Rahman Meshu reduced the margin with a neat header in the next minute.

The win took Abahani back to the top with 17 points from seven matches, two clear of Muktijoddha Sangsad while the defending champions struggle at seven points from same number of matches.

Lucky Paul gave Abahani an eighth minute lead when he followed up his thwarted attempt to find the back of the net. Piazruzzaman, who was standing for regular keeper Aminul Haque, did his best to save the initial shot but could do nothing on the rebound.

Sheikh Jamal enjoyed more possession and won a few corners but could not turn them into a goal. And that proved crucial as Awudu Ibrahim doubled the Abahani lead in the 66th minute with a solo effort as he danced past the keeper to slot it home. Jamal reduced the margin a minute, courtesy of Meshu's header on an Akon cross, but in the end that proved too little.



Abahani striker Lucky Paul (L) places the ball past Sheikh Jamal goalkeeper Piazruzzaman for the opening goal in their Grameenphone Bangladesh Premier League at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

What to WATCH

ESPN

English Premiership

Wigan v West Bromwich

Live from 9:00pm

STAR Sports

English Premiership

Fulham v Swansea City

Live from 9:00pm

TEN Action

La Liga

Sevilla v Barcelona

Live from 1:00am (Sunday)

TEN Sports

Serie A

Fiorentina v Juventus

Live from 1:45am (Sunday)

NEO Cricket

New Zealand v South Africa

Second Test, Day 4

Live from 3:00am (Sunday)

DAY'S EVENT

Premier League

Mohammedan v Team BJMC

Time: 3:45pm

Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium

Barca face Milan test

AP, Nyon

Manchester United left-back Patrice Evra said his side had got what they deserved after being eliminated from the Europa League by Athletic Bilbao on Thursday.

United needed to overturn a 3-2 deficit from the first leg but they never looked like troubling Marcelo Bielsa's slick side and went out after a one-sided 2-1 loss at San Mames saw them beaten 5-3 on aggregate.

It was the latest setback in a string of European disappointments for United, who meekly exited the Champions League at the group phase after losing 2-1 at Swiss champions FC Basel in December.

"It has been a bad year in Europe for Manchester United. We have had a difficult season," said Evra, who captained United in Bilbao.

"We have been more focused in the league, I don't know why. You have to be honest and say we don't deserve to be in the Champions League or the Europa League this season."

Beaten 3-1 by Barcelona in last season's Champions League final, United now find themselves without a major final to look forward to for the first time since the 2001-02 season.

Their only hope of silverware rests with the defence of their Premier League title.

Sir Alex Ferguson's side currently lead nearest rivals Manchester City by a point, ahead of their trip to relegation-threatened Wolverhampton Wanderers on Sunday.

Barcelona and Real Madrid were kept apart in the Champions League quarterfinals and semifinals draw Friday, though the defending champion must first beat AC Milan before the Spanish giants can hope to meet in a potentially stellar final.

Barcelona will travel for the first leg against seven-time winner Milan, in a quarterfinals clash that reunites the two European powers after they met in the group stage.

Madrid, the nine-time winner, got the most favourable draw -- playing away first against the competition's surprise team APOEL of Cyprus.

"It is a psychological advantage," said Barcelona director Amador

2nd leg: April 3-4

APoel FC	-	Real Madrid
Marseille	-	Bayern Munich
Benfica	-	Chelsea
AC Milan	-	Barcelona

Source: UEFA

Bernabeu, anticipating another meeting with Milan's former Barca forward Zlatan Ibrahimovic. "But to play Ibra is another thing. We respect him all the time."

Milan director Umberto Gandini said the Italians would have to overcome "the best club in the world."

"It's probably the most entertaining, the most attractive football clubs playing each other. But I know they are not happy about playing us," Gandini said.

Madrid arguably had most to be happy about -- avoiding the drama of facing either Barcelona or a reunion for Real coach Jose Mourinho with his former team Chelsea.

"We are glad to avoid them, it's true, but it doesn't mean we are in the semi-finals," Madrid director Emilio Butragueno said. "APOEL is the big surprise. They have all our respect."

APOEL, which started in the second qualifying round last July, is the first Cypriot team to advance so far in the world's most prestigious club competition.

"It's a dream, an experience for us," APOEL chairman Phivos Eroktitou said. "To have Real playing in Cyprus is going to be a feast for the people. We're happy that the first game is at home in Nicosia because you imagine if the first game was away with a result we couldn't bear."

Still, APOEL has shown resilience by progressing to the last-eight while scoring just seven goals in its past eight games.

Champions League

Quarter finals

1st leg: March 27-28

AP, Bilbao

2nd leg: April 3-4

AP, Madrid

AP, Nyon

AP