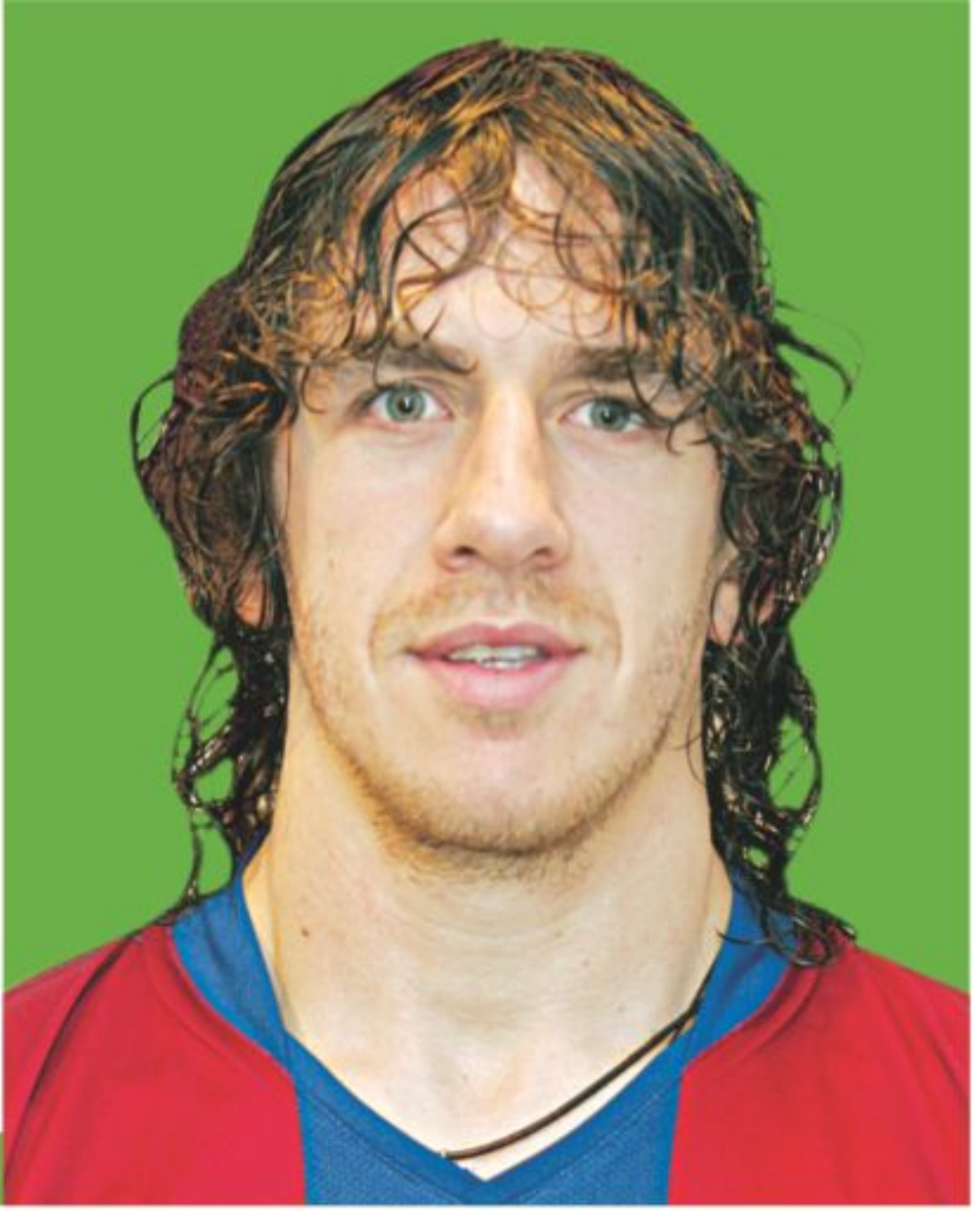


Puyol out for two months

Carles Puyol's dislocated elbow will keep him out of action for about two months and means Barcelona coach Tito Vilanova faces another unwelcome defensive conundrum for Sunday's La Liga 'Clasico' at home to Real Madrid.

In his first game back after a knee injury, Puyol landed heavily in the second half of Tuesday's 2-0 Champions League Group G victory at Benfica and the La Liga club said on Wednesday he would be sidelined for about eight weeks.

He spent the night under observation in a clinic and appeared in good



Consistency key for hosts

First semi-final today

BISHWAJIT ROY from Colombo

He was just a 10-year-old boy when Sri Lanka won the 1996 ICC World Cup under the leadership of Arjuna Ranatunga, but the memory of that glorious day is still fresh in the mind of Jayantha Silva, a cricket-crazy fan who has since been waiting to celebrate a success like that. It was just last year that India broke the hearts of millions like him. Sri Lanka were strong contenders to win the 50-over World Cup in 2011, and all but won the final against India in Mumbai if not for Gautam Gambhir and MS Dhoni's brilliant efforts.

The hosts have not yet managed to corner global glory in the shortest version of the game. The closes they came was in 2009 in England when Pakistan, their opponents in today's semifinal, cast them aside in a one-sided final, winning the match by eight wickets. Sri Lanka have been quite unlucky in this regard, losing three ICC finals as they were also denied by Australia in the 50-over World Cup final in 2007, but everybody in the country has a firm belief that Mahela Jayawardene & Co can emulate the glorious triumph of the 1996 ODI World Cup.

The hosts are now just two matches away from giving their fans an occasion to celebrate, but they might face their biggest challenge today when they meet with a fearsome Pakistan in the first semi-final of the ICC World Twenty20 at the R Premadasa International Stadium.

SEE PAGE 17 COL 2



PHOTOS: AFP

Sri Lanka's Lasith Malinga (L) and Pakistan's Saeed Ajmal will be the key components in their teams' chances to reach the World T20 final.

Weakened Abahani

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

Four-time champion and veritable football giant Abahani completed their player registration for the upcoming season yesterday by managing to retain the services of most of last season's regular players.

On paper though, the defending champions still look short in strength, after they lost key national players like Nasirul Islam, Linkon, Mamun Mia and Zahid Hasan along with national discard Intiaz Sultan Jitu and Mohammad Robin. Most of the players joined either the big-budgeted Sheikh Russel KC or archrivals Mohammedan.

Most of their replacements are not well-known faces, with national players Atiqur Rahman Meshu and Abdul Baten Komol the notable exceptions. Despite the lack of star quality, Abahani football manager Satyajit Das Rupu believed that they have roped in the right replacements and now the onus is on those players to prove themselves on the pitch.

"To keep our reputation intact as well as to defend the

SEE PAGE 17 COL 6

Focus on fielding & fitness

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh national cricket captain Mushfiqur Rahim has vowed to improve the team's fielding and fitness levels before the upcoming series against the West Indies in November. It was a statement that reflected Bangladesh's below-par performance on the field that contributed towards their early exit from the ongoing ICC World Twenty20 in Sri Lanka.

The Bangladeshi Cricket Board (BCB) president AHM Mustafa Kamal and members of the board met players of the national team and the team management in order to scrutinise their performance in the world meet.

"We talked about various issues, starting from the team's performance to their fitness issues. A number of our players suffered from dehydration during the tournament. We talked about some of the areas where the team has to improve," said Jalal Yunus, BCB media committee chairman.

The West Indies team is expected to arrive in November.

Prime Bank NCL's first franchisee

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has penned a Memorandum of Understanding with Prime Bank Foundation, a subsidiary of Prime Bank, for the upcoming National Cricket League (National Cricket League). According to the agreement, Prime Bank Foundation has received a franchisee license to operate an NCL team for the next ten years. The Bank will have to pay a yearly amount of TK 50 lakh to maintain its franchisee rights.

The MoU confirms Prime Bank's participation in the NCL. It, however, does not state the team that it will be operating. "We'll come to know about the team that has been assigned to us once the BCB gets more sponsors. We, however, prefer the Khulna Division," said Dr. Iqbal Anwar, chief executive officer of Prime Bank Foundation.

While the extent of the sponsors' control over its respective division is yet to be clarified by the BCB, the sponsors are expected to handle the management aspects of the club. "We'll be nurturing the players and we'll also be paying their salary based on the grades assigned by the BCB. This isn't like the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) T20. Our aim here is more time-bound and focused on the development of players, rather than immediate financial profit," said Tanjil Chowdhury, vice-chairman of Prime Bank Limited.

In order to run the league in the new format, the BCB formed a governing council last night. The council has been formed with representatives from different divisions with the apparent aim to create a BPL-style format for the first-class competition.

As of today, Prime Bank is the only company to have signed a deal with the BCB. BCB president AHM Mustafa Kamal however expects at least five other organisations to follow suit. The first match of the NCL is scheduled to take place on October 14. The delay in signing franchisee agreements has

SEE PAGE 17 COL 1

Pakistan look to be positive

SPORTS REPORTER from Colombo



A win is always a tonic for any team and it is especially so when it comes in the form of the victory Pakistan achieved against Australia in their last Super Eights match, a victory that saw them qualify for today's first semifinal against hosts Sri Lanka at the R Premadasa International Stadium.

Pakistan captain Mohammad Hafeez's gleaming face during the pre-match press conference reflected how confident the 2009 winners are before the first knockout clash against a team who are very strong contenders to make it to the October 7 final.

But 'The Professor' was well aware of the fact that their performance in the tournament has lurched between sublime and atrocious although they started the event as hot favourites, whereas Sri Lanka has been consistent so far. Their performances so far however will cease to matter as the competition enters the knockout stages; the general opinion is that both have similar strengths and rely on similar weapons, so today there will be a clash of equals.

Hafeez admitted as much. "Sri Lanka are a very good side and I believe it will be a good contest," said Hafeez.

Pakistan's path to the semifinals was not devoid of thorns, as they rallied from the depths of 78 for 7 to post a two-wicket win against South Africa before crashing to an embarrassing eight-wicket defeat at the hands of traditional foes India. But with elimination looming large, the mercurial subcontinental team regained rhythm to bring Australia down to earth with a 32-run victory that also led to the elimination of India.

"Sri Lanka have been playing consistently so far in the tournament but we have had ups and downs. We are now confident after the victory against Australia. I think Pakistan are a very good unit who can win the match. We

SRI LANKA PAKISTAN

Played: 46	Played: 63
Won: 27	Won: 38
In 2012	In 2012
Played: 8	Played: 13
Won: 5	Won: 8

HEAD TO HEAD 3: 6 KEY PLAYERS

MAHELA JAYAWARDENE SAEED AJMAL

Matches: 42	Matches: 47
Runs: 1149	Wickets: 68
Highest Score: 100	Economy Rate: 6.08
Average: 31.91	Bowling Average: 15.57



Visit : www.clemonsports.com
Win **Samsung Galaxy SIII** & many more lifestyle goodies

Partying Gayle caught

AFP, Colombo



West Indian star batsmen Chris Gayle burnished his party-boy image on Wednesday when police broke up a late-night gathering in his hotel room during the World Twenty20 cricket tournament in Sri Lanka.

Gayle and teammates Andre Russell, Fidel Edwards and Dwayne Smith attracted the attention of police bodyguards as they let their hair down at the luxury Cinnamon Grand hotel in Colombo.

Three British female guests who were partying in the players' rooms were removed by officers and briefly arrested, a police statement said after the early-morning antics.

The West Indies are progressing well through the

SEE PAGE 17 COL 2



PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh Cricket Board president AHM Mustafa Kamal (3rd from L) and Prime Bank Foundation CEO Dr. Iqbal Anwar exchange MoU papers for the upcoming National Cricket League at the BCB headquarters in Mirpur yesterday.