

Benitez blasts 'liar' Materazzi

Interim Chelsea manager Rafael Benitez has hit back at Marco Materazzi, calling the former Inter Milan defender "a liar" after he criticised the Spaniard's brief spell in charge of the Italian giants. Materazzi was quoted by France Football as saying that if he had the choice, he would never appoint Benitez as a manager, that he made players feel like schoolboys and that he had tried to undo everything that had made Inter successful under predecessor Jose Mourinho. But Benitez had no time for Materazzi's account on Tuesday, telling reporters: "He's lying. Marco Materazzi is lying."



Niaz finishes fourth

Despite taking the lead in the penultimate round, Grand Master Niaz Murshed had to be content with a fourth place finish in the Chennai Super Kings 5th International Grandmasters Chess Tournament as he drew the last round game in Chennai yesterday. Niaz, who shared the lead along with five other players at the end of the tenth round, drew against Indian GM B Adhiban in the last round. The first GM of the sub-continent played with white pieces in Closed Catalan Game was forced to a draw after 30 moves. Niaz earned 8.5 points to tie the third position before being placed fourth through a tie-breaking. Niaz was awarded six thousand rupees for this performance.

Indian GM Lalith Babu
SEE PAGE 17 COL 4

Transfer window closes

Mohammedan SC, Feni Soccer Club and Arambagh KS yesterday signed up new players on the last day of the mid-season players' transfer window which had began on January 10. Relegation threatened Feni Soccer Club signed up three foreigners -- Mansour Badjo, Wassiou Okalawan, Anthony Pele and local player Ariful Haque Shaikat from BCIC of Chittagong while Mohammedan signed up three foreign players -- Nigerian Dauda Kazeem Olalekan and two foreign recruits from Chittagong Mohammedan Blues and Chittagong City

SEE PAGE 17 COL 8



Zimbabwean Hamilton Masakadza salutes the sparse Khulna crowd after his quickfire fifty for Sylhet Royals against Khulna Royal Bengals in a BPL fixture at the Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

Royals rule Bengals

A good bowling performance coupled with some hard hitting at the top of the order helped the Sylhet Royals race to their third consecutive victory in the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) T20. With the strong performance, Sylhet Royals comfortably beat Khulna Royal Bengals by six wickets and with 3.4 overs to spare at the Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium in Khulna yesterday. The victory extends the Royals' unbeaten run and they currently have six points. Khulna on the other hand continue their horrible run in the tournament as they have lost all their three games so far. A powerful beginning by Sylhet's openers resulted in the team requiring only 10 runs off the last five overs. The winning runs were scored through a flick off the pads for a boundary by Elton Chigumbura in the 17th over. Sylhet made easy work of their chase of 146 as their openers Paul Stirling and Hamilton Masakadza launched a scathing attack against Khulna's bowlers. They raced their way to a 78-run partnership off just 32 balls. The

highlight of the stand came in the second over when the batsmen smacked 25 runs off Afghanistan's Shapoor Zadran. The over witnessed two towering sixes and three boundaries. Masakadza continued his attacking display as he hit four boundaries off Forhad Reza in the third over. Paul Stirling went one step ahead when he hit three sixes off Sanjamul Islam in the fourth over. The run-spree continued till sixth over before spinner Nabil Samad bowled Stirling for 38. Mominul Haque fell soon

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after as he was caught at long off while attempting to clear the ropes off Samad in the 10th over. Masakadza, in the meanwhile, reached his half-century off 33 balls but fell soon after courtesy of a gem of a delivery by Zadran, which came back in to hit the stumps. Earlier, Khulna got off to a slow start as they scored only 13 runs in the first four overs. To make matters worse, they lost their skipper Shahriar Nafees in the fourth

SEE PAGE 17 COL 1

Young guns fly the local flag

There has been a lot of talk about the lack of foreign players 'de-valuing' the second edition of the Bangladesh Premier League this year. Ironically however, it was the performance of two Bangladeshi youngsters in the game between the Barisal Burners and the Rangpur Riders that entertained the sparse crowd at the Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium yesterday. Both in their early 20s, Shamsur Rahman and Sabbir Rahman, batted brilliantly for their half-centuries and played key roles for their respective teams. While Shamsur's 66 off 40 balls set the tone for Rangpur and helped them set a formidable score, Sabbir's 69 off 35 almost took Barisal home. Such was the power of Sabbir's innings that it took a remarkable catch from Shamsur in the last over to swing the momentum back in favour of the Riders. "I think the catch was more important than my innings, because they needed just 14 off 3 balls at the end," exclaimed a relieved Shamsur at the end of the match yesterday. "I got to open the innings and that's where I like to play. So the shots that I played came naturally," added Shamsur. While the Barisal batsman depended more on his instincts Sabbir, who said it was his best T20 effort, said he planned his innings. "I was looking for the right bowler to hit. Like Sunny bhai or some other spinner and hit the ball whenever it was in the zone," he said. Sabbir said he received plenty of encouragement from

SEE PAGE 17 COL 8

Rangpur ride out Sabbir storm

A quickfire half-century from Shamsur Rahman helped Rangpur Riders clinch their second consecutive win when they beat Barisal Burners in a closely contested Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) T20 match by seven runs at the Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium in Khulna yesterday. With 48 runs needed off the last three overs to reach the 175-run target and with

SCORES IN BRIEF
RANGPUR RIDERS: 174 for four (Shamsur 66, Kayes 29, N O' Brien 27; Sunny 2-21, Kapali 1-34).
BARISAL BURNERS: 167 for 8 (Sabbir 69, Hodge 58; Razzak 4-33, Mascarenhas 1-24, Edwards 1-25).
Result: Rangpur Riders won by 7 runs.

five wickets in hand, Barisal made a good fist of it mainly through a blistering 35-ball 69 from Sabbir Rahman. The 18th over by Riders captain Abdur Razzak produced ten courtesy of a six from Sabbir's bat but also two wickets in two balls, and the 19th over by Fidel Edwards -- which contained a wide delivery that went for four -- yielded 12. Sabbir then had the mountainous task of scoring 26 off the last over against Razzak and managed 12 off the first three but was eventually dismissed off the fourth when Shamsur pulled off a brilliant diving catch at long on. Elias Sunny's six off the last ball merely reduced the victory margin. Burners were in early trouble in the chase as Edwards dismissed Phil Mustard in the first over and Dimitri Mascarenhas accounted for Joe Denly in the fourth. Skipper Brad Hodge and Alok Kapali

SEE PAGE 17 COL 2



Champion all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan enjoyed a day's break from cricket by visiting his family home in Magura along with his newly-wed wife Umme Ahmed Shishir (L) on Wednesday. The couple stayed there for some time before heading back to Khulna where Shakib is playing for Dhaka Gladiators in the BPL. PHOTO: HOSSAIN SIRAJ

India clinch ODI series

A rejuvenated India clinched the one-day series against England as the hosts rode on the batting heroics of Rohit Sharma (83) and Suresh Raina (89 not out) to fashion a comfortable five-wicket victory in the penultimate game and take an unassailable 3-1 lead on Wednesday. The Indians first restricted the visitors to 257 for seven and then overcame some anxious moments before overhauling the target with 15 balls to spare in a floodlit contest played in cold conditions at the Punjab Cricket Association Stadium in Mohali. Though the hosts had the game in control after putting England into bat, they conceded as many as 100 runs in the last ten overs with unheralded Joe Root (57 not out off 45 balls) and Kevin Pietersen (76) providing the late sparks with some lusty hits. Captain Alastair Cook was another notable performer with a knock of 76. But the Indians held their nerve during the run chase and it was ultimately Raina who guided the team home. It was a creditable series victory for Mahendra Singh Dhoni and his men who had come under fire for indifferent performances in recent times, which saw the team lose a Test series to England and an ODI series defeat against arch-rivals Pakistan at home. It was Rohit Sharma, rated as highly talented but one who has seldom delivered, who turned the spotlight on himself as he grabbed with both hands an unexpected opportunity to feature in the playing eleven as an opener

SEE PAGE 17 COL 4

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