Div I v'ball

SPORTS REPORTER

Nabo Jagarani Sangha, Uttara Sporting Club and Bangladesh Jail won their respective matches in the Walton Air Conditioner First Division Volleyball League at the Volleyball Stadium yesterday.

Nabo Jagarani defeated Mothertek Mitali Sangha, Uttara thrashed Sabolambi Society and Bangladesh Jail beat Bhai Bhai Sangha, all by identical 3-0 sets.

Novak sizzles

FROM PAGE 16 best time in his career in the last few years, he won 11 titles last year, but tonight I just played

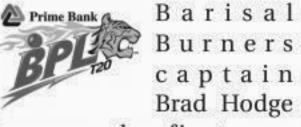
incredible," Djokovic said. "I don't expect myself to play always this well, but I was free in my mind tonight and hopefully I can maintain that to the final."

It is Djokovic's fourth Australian Open final in six years and he is looking to become the first man in the Open era to win three consecutive Australian titles.

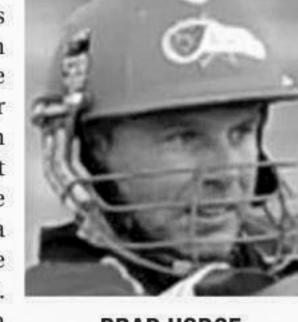
By reaching the semifinals Djokovic is already guaranteed to hold on to the number one ranking.

Hodge first to 5,000

SPORTS REPORTER from Khulna



became the first ever batsman to score more than 5000 runs in T20 cricket with his 34 against the Chittagong Kings in Khulna yesterday. He reached the landmark in 171 matches. Hodge, who has been Barisal's mainstay ever



BRAD HODGE

since the inception of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) T20, has played for 14 Twenty20 teams around the world and scored at an average of 36.29. He scored two centuries and 34 half-centuries in this format of the game.

The batsman, who required 25 runs to reach the milestone at the start of his innings, did so in the eighth over with a drive through cover in yesterday's game. The record was the only bright spot for the captain yesterday as his team slumped to an unexpected 21-run defeat to the Kings."It was a game that we should have won. Chasing 130 should not have been difficult. Our batting was pretty average, we needed to play with a lot more freedom," Hodge said at the end of the match.

He was however delighted to have reached the landmark. "I am just very happy. I have made 10,000 plus runs in Sheffield Shield and 5,000 in T20s, means that have performed well over the course of my lifetime, Hodge told EspnCricinfo.

Competition keeps Mahmood going

SPORTS REPORTER from Khulna



Having picked up more than 150 wickets and scored close to 3000 runs in T20 cricket, Pakistan all-

rounder Azhar Mahmood, playing for the Barisal Burners in the Bangladesh Premier League, is considered a veteran in this format of the game today. At 37, Mahmood continues to be a top pick in all the major T20 competitions including the Big Bash League in Australia and the Indian Premier League.

His good form opened a pathway for him to play for Pakistan in the recently concluded series in India. Azhar, who last represented Pakistan in the 2007 World Cup has been playing county cricket since 2005 and recently became a British citizen.

"They asked me before the India series if I could come and play T20 cricket, just T20. But that's not worth it for me. For example, they stopped sending their players for BPL, and IPL is not open to Pakistani players and I can't stop my opportunities," said Mahmood.

"I asked them to give me a one-year contract but they said just come and play. But I am not 27 any more, I am 37 and I have to look at my opportunities. I have to run my family as well," he added.

The player was also critical of the Pakistan Cricket Board's decision to not send its players to Bangladesh. "It's a shame that we can't see Pakistani players It's unfortunate, whatever happened between the two boards. I understand Pakistan's point of view, but they should allow the first-class players who are not contracted with the PCB. Why would you stop them from earning?" said Mahmood.

Not many would have expected the player who began his Test career with a rollicking century against South Africa in 1997 and who was also once in contention to lead Pakistan, to be playing exclusively T20 cricket at the fag end of his career. Mahmood was however content with the way his career has panned out so far. "When you can't play international cricket, then this is the dream for any player. I just want to play competitive cricket and that's what I am getting in all these leagues," said the 37-year-old. As for his future, Mahmood leaves it to fate. When asked how long he plans to stay with the game, his reply in a way reflected his determined approach to cricket. " don't have a plan, I love the game and will continue playing till my body allows me to," said Mahmood.

Qatar, Kuwait, India to play in Gold Cup

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) yesterday officially announced their intention to organise an international football tournament in October. Eight nations; Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Thailand, Malaysia, Myanmar, India and Bangladesh; are set to take part in the Bangabandhu International Gold Cup, the first international meet to be organised by the BFF in nearly fifteen years.

"I have already talked to the presidents of nine to ten football federations and today [Thursday] the executive body has approved my proposal of hosting the Bangabandhu International Gold Cup. Now I will invite them officially for the tournament to be held in Dhaka in October," said BFF president Kazi League and then will move to Nepal again to Salahuddin yesterday.

Promising to host the Bangabandhu International Gold Cup regularly, Salahuddin said that this time he would sit with all eight presidents of participating nations together and take confirmation for two more years beyond the current one. It is the first time in 14 years that the BFF is going to host the international tournament since the last International Football Tournament, also named after Bangabandhu, was held in 1999.

Afterwards the football governing body had hosted different tournaments or international matches such as the AFC

Challenge Cup Qualifiers, the SAFF Championship, FIFA World Cup qualifiers, Olympic qualifiers, Asian Games qualifiers, AFC President's Cup, international friendly between Argentina and Nigeria but they never organised any themselves. In meeting that preceded the announcement it was also decided to stage the third Super Cup in between May to April.

The announcement of hosting Bangabandhu Gold Cup and Super Cup means a hectic schedule is ahead for the footballers. The booters are now engaged in the ongoing professional football league. They will then go to Nepal to participate in the AFC Challenge Cup qualifiers in March and be engaged in the Independence Cup upon their return from Nepal. Afterwards, they are scheduled to play a couple o international friendlies in August after the completion of the Bangladesh Premier play the SAFF Championship in September before returning for the Bangabandhu International Gold Cup in October.

Salahuddin informed that the meeting also approved the appointment of the Dutch coaches, who are scheduled to take the charge of the national team in February temporary before taking it fully in June.

The meeting also promoted acting general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag to BFF general secretary. The post had been vacant since the premature death of Al Musabbir Sadi in April 2011. Shohag joined the BFF in 2005 as a competition manager.

FRA AGM cancelled

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) yesterday suspended the annual general meeting and election of Football Referees' Association (FRA), which was scheduled to take place today at the NSC conference room.

"Football Referees" Association is an affiliated body of Bangladesh Football Federation but they did not inform us about their elections, even they did not approve their amended constitution from the BFF. They have been asked to hold the AGM and elections in line with proper procedure," said BFF vice president Badal Roy, who is also chairman of BFF Referees' Committee.

Some 199 councillors across the country were supposed to elect a 27member committee.

Kings open

FROM PAGE 16

while attempting a similar shot. Joe Denly was caught behind in the next over and suddenly the below-par target of 130 seemed like a mountainous task.

In the next three overs Barisal scored only 7 runs. The pressure was building and Azhar Mahmood's attempt to counter it resulted in his wicket in the 8th over as he was caught by Brendan Taylor off Kevon Cooper. The pressure was kept on by some good bowling from the spinners, especially Enamul Haque Jr who gave away only 12 runs and picked up 2 wickets in his 4 overs.

Earlier, the Chittagong Kings continued their poor run with the bat and failed to hit any sixes, a rarity in the BPL. Except for the 52run stand between openers Naeem Islam and Ravi Bopara, who got the manof-the-match award for his 29-ball 38, the rest of the top order failed to click.

Skipper Mahmoodullah, who came to bat at four was dismissed cheaply by Shafiul Islam while Brendan Taylor, who had scored a fine half-century in Chittagong's previous match, fell in his attempt to clear the ropes against Elias Sunny. Newly arrived Ryan Ten Doeschate and allrounder Jacob Oram steadily re-built the innings with a 37-run stand off 29 balls and helped the Kings cross the 120-mark.

SCORES IN BRIEF CHITTAGONG KINGS: 129 for 7 (Bopara 38, ten Doeschate 23, Naeem 19, Oram 18; Mahmood 2-22,

Shafiul 2-24, Kabir 2-27). **BARISAL BURNERS: 108** for 9 (Hodge 34, Kapali 12; Enamul 2-12, Cooper 2-18, Sunny 2-23).

Result: Chittagong Kings won by 21 runs.

Player-of-the-match: Ravi Bopara

U-18 cricket

FROM PAGE 16

Sylhet's Efteker Ahmed's six-wicket haul against Dhaka North was the highlight at the Dinajpur Stadium. Jakir Hasan made 75 at the Cricket Garden in

Rangpur. **SCORES IN BRIEF**

BKSP: First innings 209 all out (Jakir 75, Nazmul 49; Gazi 3-49, Al Imarn 3-51). BARISAL: First Innings 11-1 in 10 overs.

DHAKA NORTH: First innings 85 all out (Ashiqur 43 not out; Efteker 6-34). **SYLHET:** First Innings 23-2

in 21 overs. **DHAKA DIV SOUTH: First** Innings 345-6 (Saif 127 not out, Asif 57; Rabbi 2-81). CHITTAGONG: First innings 264 all out (Suman 112, Fakruddin 68; Miftab 4-28, Nabin 3-63). **RANGPUR:** First Innings 18-0 in 9 overs.

Li, Victoria showdown

AFP, Melbourne

The Grand Slam of Asia/Pacific

China's Li Na shocked Maria Sharapova Thursday to set up an Australian Open final against 2012 champion Victoria

Azarenka, who beat teenager Sloane Stephens in controversial circumstances.

Li, Asia's first Grand Slam singles champion, came out firing and halted Sharapova's storming run with a blaze of aggression which stunned the four-time major champion 6-2, 6-2.

The Chinese world number six, who reaches her second Melbourne final, now has a chance to add to her historic 2011 French Open crown which brought tennis to public attention in her home country.

While Li was compelling against Sharapova, drama unfolded in the second semifinal when Azarenka let slip five match points before being broken, and then took a 10-minute medical timeout off the court. When she returned, with 19-year-old Stephens serving

to stay in the match, the Belarusian world number one broke for a 6-1, 6-4 victory. In the earlier match, Sharapova had lost only nine games in her march to the semi-finals, a tournament record, but Li was always going to provide a far sterner

test despite trailing 4-8 in their head-to-head

And the Russian started disastrously with consecutive Sharapova finished with a ruinous 32 unforced errors.

double faults as she was broken in the opening game.

Four-time major winner Sharapova could have returned to the world number one ranking had she won her second Australian Open title, but Li's ball-striking had her on the back foot from the outset.

Benefiting from her intense off-season fitness training under new coach Carlos Rodriguez, Li was untroubled by the sweltering heat in Melbourne and broke for a second time to take a 4-1 lead.

Her serving was steady, and her groundstrokes were probing. Two close video rulings went against Li and Sharapova retrieved one of the service breaks, only to hand it straight back.

China's 2011 French Open champion closed out the opening set in 48 minutes, but she then missed a sitter of a forehand in a worrying sign at the beginning of the second set.

She resolutely held her serve, however, and Sharapova stumbled in the fifth game. The fifth of Sharapova's six double faults handed Li another chance to break and when the Russian went long with a backhand, Liled 3-2.

She led 40-15 in the next game but Sharapova unloaded some ferocious winners to reach break point. Li recovered to move within sight of the finish line, breaking again for 5-2. Li lost her first match point by hooking a forehand

wide, but she then polished off the upset victory as

in October last year.

Bells tolling for Nadir

FROM PAGE 16

encounters.

was ready to disclose the recommendations made by the committee, terming it highly confidential.

"As far as I know the committee submitted their report to the board president (BCB president Nazmul Hassan Papon) yesterday (Wednesday). The next course of action is to discuss the reports and recommendations in the next board meeting and then the board will communicate its decision to the ICC (International Cricket Council)," said BCB's acting CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury yesterday. The committee, which was formed

by the BCB's ad-hoc committee after the previous committee failed to submit their report within the stipulated time, talked with all the parties and scrutinised the video footage before submitting its report. But it is

assumed that Nadir Shah is set to be found guilty of more than one offence. According to the ICC code of conduct for umpires and the anti-corruption rule, an umpire must inform the concerned authorities immediately upon receipt of any offer or proposal but Nadir did not comply with that guideline. But the other Bangladesh umpire under the scanner, Sharfuddoula Ibne Shahid Saikat, had reported the matter to the BCB, which will help him escape punishment. Although Nadir has not taken any

bribe from the string operation, it was understood that the video footage and other evidence convinced the committee that he will take the opportunity if tempted in the future. Nadir and Sharfuddoula had been investigated for allegations of 'cor-

rupt conduct' levied by an Indian

news channel which conducted a

The BCB, along with the ICC and the cricket boards of Sri Lanka and Pakistan, had agreed not to appoint any of the umpires named by India

sting operation and aired the footage

TV in domestic and international matches until an inquiry is conducted. Bangladesh's Nadir Shah was the only umpire shown in the sting to have met the undercover reporters in person while Sharfuddoula Ibne Shahid Saikat was the other umpire

who was shown to have had a Skype

conversation with India TV. Nadir, who has officiated in 40 ODIs and three Twenty20 Internationals last officiated in an international match during the Bangladesh-Pakistan ODI match at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur in December 2011.

Nafees scripts records

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Both Vincent and Nafees took their time to get set and once that was done they clobbered the ball to all corners of the park.

Having been plundered while on the field, it was a tired-looking Rajshahi lineup that took up the chase of 198. The team crumbled under the pressure of the asking run rate, especially after key player Tamim Iqbal perished in the fourth over to a lazy-looking drive that had him bowled off an inside edge.

Earlier, after being put in to bat, Khulna began their innings in a manner that was completely at odds to their flamboyant ending; opener Vincent played out six dot balls against spinner Monir Hossain. But ever since that maiden over, it was all Khulna as openers Nafees and Vincent went on a run spree. Apart from overs one and three, every over featured at least one boundary.

Boundaries came thick and fast as the openers smacked 81 runs in the first 10 overs. A huge six by Vincent over long-on off Ben Edmondson was an indication of the things to come. Nafees, who till then let his partner do most of the talking, unleashed three consecutive boundaries off Monir in the 14th over. He continued

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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Solution time: 25 mins.

50 Yale

on his merry way as he drove Edmondson twice through the covers for fours in the next over.

The last five overs witnessed five sixes as the pair rocketed to the second highest opening partnership in T20 cricket.

"I have never played an innings like this in T20s. When I scored 50, I tried batting till the end. But scoring a 100 in T20 was something that was unbelievable. I believe that I couldn't play my A game for a long time," said Nafees after the match, alluding to his recent troubles with the bat. Nafees also credited Vincent's aggressive batting for his success. "A lot of credit goes to Lou Vincent, the way he was the hitting the sixes. I batted like I normally did, was going for the singles. It wouldn't have been possible without a partner like Vincent. 90 per cent credit goes to him."

SCORES IN BRIEF

KHULNA ROYAL BENGALS: 197-0 (Vincent 89, Nafees

DURONTO RAJSHAHI: 129 all out in 18.3 overs (Coventry 23, Jahurul 26, Katich 16, Ervine 22, Ali 22; Reza 3-22, Zadran 2-9, Harris 2-19)

Result: Khulna Royal Bengals won by 68 runs. Player-of-the-match: Shahriar Nafees.

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CRYPTOQUIP

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PL LFRVVLZ RE C UMO TLDL

VX SRGJ WRK ECGL HLDO

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: WE ARE ABOUT TO SEND A FIERY DISTRESS SIGNAL INTO THE AIR.

PCZBO: KWCHRSU KGDLCF.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: V equals T

YOU HAVE BEEN GIVEN FLARE WARNING!

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