



Players of Abahani (L) and Sk Jamal go through their drills at their respective club grounds yesterday, ahead of their Federation Cup semifinal clash at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today.



PHOTOS: STAR

The wait begins

SPORTS REPORTER



The ICC World Twenty20 is now in the air. The tournament may still be more than three months away, but the country has started to get into the excitement through the unveiling of the 100 days countdown clock in three host cities of Dhaka, Chittagong and Sylhet simultaneously at midnight Thursday. However, for some lucky fans the countdown had already started last month when they got hold of their precious tickets via internet.

The trophy of the tournament has arrived in the city and it will be on display at Hyundai Bangladesh office. But for the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) the most satisfactory matter right at this moment is that the venues are almost ready.

An ICC inspection team arrived in Dhaka last Sunday to have a final look of the venues that will be involved in hosting of the mega ICC event in March next year.

Matches will be played at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong and the newly built Sylhet Divisional Stadium.

While majority of the stadiums received ICC's approval, there were certain issues with regard to the Sylhet Divisional Stadium, which will be hosting majority of the Women's World Cup and six first-round matches of the men's event, but BCB's acting CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury said yesterday that everything is in place.

"We have been engaged with the venues for long but now everything is in place, so we are now focussing on the other issues like marketing, security and logistics," said Nizamuddin.

Bangladesh successfully hosted a number of global cricketing events including the 2011 World Cup previously, but it would be the country's biggest one in terms of the number of participating teams.

The first match of the Twenty20 meet will be played between the hosts and Afghanistan at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Dhaka on March 16.

Meanwhile, Nizamuddin also informed that they would write to the ICC (International Cricket Council) for venue accreditation of the Sylhet Divisional Stadium. "We will write for the approval of the venue for both Test and ODI by next week," he added.

The new venue is scheduled to be baptised with holding a one-day international between Bangladesh and Sri Lanka on January 17.

The unofficial final!

Abahani-Sk Jamal first semifinal today

SPORTS REPORTER



When Abahani and Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club take to the field at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today the game will carry the enviable tag of the 'unofficial final', although it would be the first Federation Cup semifinal between the strongest two sides.

Last season's runners-up Sheikh Jamal, who were involved in the last three finals of the season's curtain-raiser, dispatched Mohammedan 3-1 whereas eight-time champions Abahani, on the other hand, blanked a nondescript Feni Soccer Club 2-0 in the quarterfinals.

With Mohammedan and Sheikh Russel, who won a rare domestic treble last season, already eliminated, today's game will also mark the departure of another giants, leaving the winners with a relatively easier task of facing either a depleted Muktiyoddha Sangsad or Team BJMC in the final billed on Monday.

Sheikh Jamal have reasons to feel superior than their big Dhanmondi neighbours for not only that they had dominated Mohammedan in their previous game but for having a player like Haitian Sony Norde, who struck five of his side's six goals in three matches.

The new leviathans, who defeated Abahani in the quarterfinal stages of the last two seasons since a 3-5 loss in their maiden Federation Cup final in 2010, is also the strongest side on paper.

However, despite having the records and performance in their favour, Sheikh Jamal's Nigerian coach Joseph Afusi is not taking Abahani lightly and termed his opponents as one of powerhouses, which have some talented and experienced national players along with last season's highest scorer and more importantly the fans to cheer them in the stands.

Jamal captain Mamunul Islam said: "It's a fifty-fifty match between the two strongest sides. But we are confident to win the match putting our finest performance on the pitch."

Sheikh Jamal have so far banked heavily on Sony, who picked up a thigh injury in the previous match but despite the injury scare club insiders are confident that Sony would be in the starting eleven.

It will be a battle within a battle involving Sony and Abahani's Ghanaian hitman Osei Morison, who also struck five goals.

Abahani are also confident to reach the final after two seasons. The Sky Blues, who have not conceded a single goal so far in three games, want to maintain that standard.

"We had good training in the last two days and everyone is eager to play the semifinal," said Abahani coach Amalesh Sen.

"If we can keep up the good work, then we can expect a final berth beating Sheikh Jamal," said Sen.

The coach also confirmed that left-back Wali Faisal would be back after mourning the death of his newborn son. He also did not rule out the possibility of Brazilian midfielder De Souza's Dhaka debut today.

Bangladeshis exit in qtrs

SPORTS REPORTER



The semifinal line-ups of the Yonex-Sunrise Bangladesh Open International Badminton Challenge were completed yesterday with the top seeds in both men's and women's singles advancing to the last four at the Suhrawardi Indoor Stadium in Mirpur.

In the men's singles, top seed Hsu Jen Hao of Chinese Taipei, second seeded Indian Subhankar Dey, third seed Yogendran Krishnan of Malaysia and fifth seed Dharma Alrie Guna of Indonesia were the winners while in the women's section, top seed Pai Hsiao Ma of Chinese Taipei, second seed Saili Rane of India, third seed Sannatash Saniru of Malaysia and fourth seed Trupti Murgunde of India confirmed their last four berths.

By the end of the third day, all Bangladeshi

shuttlers were eliminated from the tournament as Bristy Khatun lost to Hsiao Ma 10-21 and 5-21 in the women's singles quarterfinals while the Bristy Khatun-Rehana Parvin pair lost to Kapuru Mudiyansele-Weerasinghe pair by 7-21 and 8-21 points in the doubles, followed by the Nabila Akter-Shapla Akter pair, who suffered a 12-21 and 14-21 defeat to Dhanya Nair-Mohita Sadev pair in the quarterfinals of the same event.

In the mixed doubles, Bangladesh's Mohammad Javed and Shapla suffered a 13-21, 9-21 defeat to Indian pair of Gaurav Venkat and Juhi Dewangan while the pair of Ahsan Habib Parash and Nabila lost to Malaysia's Nurizwan and S Saniru 15-21, 16-21 to exit from the tournament.

All semifinals in men's singles and doubles and women's singles and doubles and mixed doubles will take place today at the same venue.

Special day at Special Olympics

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Bangladesh experienced a special day in the Asia Pacific Region Games of Special Olympics yesterday when they bagged nine gold, five silver and four bronze medals on the fifth day at New Castle in Australia.

Of the nine gold medals, three came in athletics and two each in swimming, badminton and bocce, according to the official website of the event.

Sagar Ahmed bagged gold in Division M-9 200m run with a time of 27.34 seconds while Chaity Akter became the fastest woman in Division F-8 after clocking 17.58 seconds in the 100m run. Humayun Kabir became champion in Division M-1 200m run with a time of 27.62 seconds.

In badminton doubles in F-4 category, Munni Akhter and Rabeya Khatun won gold medal while swimmer Parul Akter won 50m freestyle gold with a time of 40.45 seconds while Jakia Sultana and Sadia Urmi won gold medals in bocce singles events.

Apart from them, Ratan Mia, Mizanur Rahman and Ashikul Islam won silver medals while athlete Misti Akter, swimmers K Khatun and M Masud and the 4X100m relay team bronze medals for Bangladesh.

Bangladesh's total medal tally rose to 27 -- 16 gold, six silver and five bronze, said a press release from Grameenphone, who are the sponsors of the Bangladesh contingent.

Windies face innings defeat

AFP, Dunedin



West Indies battled to avoid a third consecutive innings defeat on Thursday, ending day three of the first Test against New Zealand on Thursday at 168-2, still 228 runs short of making the home side bat again.

The tourists were forced to follow on after they were dismissed for 213 in their first innings, with New Zealand pace pair Tim Southee and Trent Boult doing most of the damage after New Zealand racked up an imposing 609-9 declared.

Although the Caribbean side batted more responsibly in their second innings on a flat University Oval wicket in Dunedin, they face an uphill struggle to avoid another demoralising defeat.

Boult struck early in their second innings when he had Kieran Powell caught at second slip by Southee to leave the West Indies 18 for one.

Kirk Edwards and Darren Bravo steadied the innings, putting on 117 for the second wicket before the leg spin of Ish Sodhi trapped Edwards in front for 59.

At stumps Bravo was not out 72 with Marlon Samuels on 17.

The West Indies arrived in New Zealand talking up their need for a morale-boosting win after being subjected to back-to-back innings defeats by India.

Instead they have struggled badly, failing to take advantage of a green-tinged wicket on the opening day before allowing themselves to be dominated by the New Zealand quicks.

On a wicket that now holds few dangers, they were largely undone in their first innings by a lack of footwork against seaming, full-length, deliveries.

Six of the top seven in the batting order were caught behind the stumps, with Shivnarine Chanderpaul the sole exception.

The 39-year-old held the West Indies first innings together as he worked his way to 76 before being trapped lbw by Boult without offering a shot.

Same poor start for Siddikur

SPORTS REPORTER

Siddikur Rahman failed to carry his good form of the Indonesian Open into the Hong Kong Open as the ace Bangladesh golfer played a one-over-par 71 in the first round at the Spectacular Hong Kong Golf Club yesterday.

Siddikur, who finished fourth in Indonesia last week, will now be hoping to avoid the cut on the second day as he was in the joint 69th position along with 18 others.

After playing an even par in the first four holes, the two-time a champion on the Asian Tour bogeyed in the fifth hole before double-bogeying in the next. But the 29-year-old golfer minimised his over stroke after playing birdies in the eighth and 12th holes respectively to finish the day with a one-over-par 71.

Swann balances the day

AFP, Adelaide



A leaping catch by Graeme Swann shortly before close of play kept England in contention against Australia on the opening day of the second Ashes Test in Adelaide on Thursday.

The Australians, one-up in the series, looked in control at 257 for four nearing

stumps, before Swann held a flying catch two-handed at square leg to dismiss the threatening George Bailey for 53.

Bailey had looked set for a substantial score batting with skipper Michael Clarke before he hooked paceman Stuart Broad to Swann, whose brilliant piece of fielding meant the day finished with honours even.

At the close, Australia were 273-5 after winning the toss with Clarke, who boasts a ground average of more than 100, on 48 and Brad Haddin on seven.

It could have been even better for England. Michael Carberry at backward point dropped a sitter off Haddin shortly before the close.

"I think it's a fairly even day. Having lost the toss at Adelaide you always fear the worst as a bowler but I think five wickets in a day is a pretty good return," Swann said.

"Obviously, six or seven wickets would have been a lot better. We missed a couple of half-chances that we'll rue, but if we turn up in the morning and take a couple of quick wickets it could all quickly be forgotten."

Bailey was in aggressive mood, smashing three sixes, two of them off-spinner Monty Panesar and a pull off paceman Broad.

Panesar put down Bailey, missing a sharp caught and bowled chance when he was on 10 and Clarke survived when a flying Joe Root put him down at midwicket off Swann.

England had grabbed three crucial wickets to peg Australia back in the half-hour before tea after the home side made a strong start.

Chris Rogers and Shane Watson put on a century stand for the second wicket before both departed in the space of six balls.

Then, in the last over before tea, recalled spinner Panesar bowled Steve Smith for six to put England on top in a Test they cannot afford to lose in the five-Test series.

"It felt more like a day three wicket really," Rogers said. "Runs on the board are going to be crucial. If we can keep going, get 400, it's going to be hard work for England."

Watson once again missed out on a big score after making a solid start when he was caught and bowled by Jimmy Anderson for 51.

The number three looked well set after 160 minutes at the crease before he chipped a return catch low down to Anderson on the bowler's follow-through.

Watson put on 121 runs for the second wicket with Rogers. It was his 21st Test half-century but he only has three centuries.

Rogers followed five balls later, attempting to hit Swann through the covers only to be caught behind by Matt Prior for 72.

SCOREBOARD

AUSTRALIA: First innings				
Rogers c Prior b Swann	21	9	56	1
Warner c Carberry b Broad	29			
Watson c & b Anderson	51			
Clarke not out	48			
Smith b Panesar	6			
Bailey c Swann b Broad	53			
Haddin not out	7			
Extras: (b-5, nb-2)	7			
Total: (For 5 wkts in 91 overs)	273			
To bat: Johnson, Siddie, Harris, Lyon				
Fall of wickets: 1-34, 2-155, 3-155, 4-174, 5-257				
Bowler	O	M	R	W
Anderson	21	9	56	1
Broad	19	3	63	2
Swann	19	2	55	1
Panesar	24	4	68	1
Stokes	8	2	26	0
ENGLAND: Cook, Carberry, Root, Pietersen, Bell, Stokes, Prior, Broad, Swann, Anderson, Panesar.				
Toss: Australia.				

SCOREBOARD

NEW ZEALAND: First innings 609-9 declared (Taylor 217 not out, McCullum 113, Rutherford 62, Fulton 61; Best 3-148)					
WEST INDIES: First innings (overnight 67-2)					
Edwards c Fulton b Boult	0				
Powell c Watling b Southee	7				
Bravo c McCullum b Southee	40				
Samuels c Taylor b Southee	14				
Chanderpaul lbw b Boult	76				
Deonarine c Taylor b Southee	15				
Ramdin c Watling b Boult	12				
Sammy not out	27				
Shillingford b Sodhi	9				
Best run out	0				
Gabriel lbw Sodhi	0				
Extras: (lb-11, w-1, nb-1)	13				
Total: (All out in 62.1 overs)	213				
Fall of wickets: 1-4, 2-24, 3-70, 4-73, 5-106, 6-174, 7-183, 8-202, 9-205					
Bowler	O	M	R	W	
Boult	18	5	40	3	
Southee	16	1	52	4	
Wagner	13	2	47	0	
Sodhi	15.1	2	63	2	
WEST INDIES: Second innings					
Edwards lbw b Sodhi	59				
Powell c Southee b Boult	14				
Bravo not out	72				
Samuels not out	17				
Extras: (lb-2, b-4)	6				
Total: (For 2 wkts in 49 overs)	168				
Fall of wickets: 1-18, 2-135					
Bowler	O	M	R	W	
Southee	10	1	36	0	
Boult	9	2	26	1	
Wagner	9	1	35	0	
Anderson	6	1	8	0	