

Fahad keeps on winning

SPORTS REPORTER

FIDE Master Fahad Rahman was sharing the fourth position with six points after beating Saberi Mahan of Iran in the seventh round of the World Youth Chess Championship (U-10 group) in Al Ain of the United Arab Emirates on Monday.

It was a big jump for the Bangladeshi in the latest round after he was jointly-sharing the ninth position at the end of the previous round.

Fahad was scheduled to play against Abdrashev Arlen of Kazakhstan in the eighth round yesterday.



Scheduling of the Victory Day T20 Cup gave the cricketers a rest day yesterday, yet some players of Mohammedan and UCB BCB XI availed the opportunity to enjoy a game of football at the Sylhet Divisional Stadium.

PHOTO: STAR

BCB to seek parties' open declaration

SPORTS REPORTER

The security issue may not yet be a big concern for the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) ahead of the two international tournaments to be hosted next year, but as a precautionary measure the game's governing body is now going to make a formal request to all political parties for an open declaration.

"Our board president [Nazmul Hassan Papon] already appealed to the political parties to keep cricket out of any political activities. Now we are going to make it formal within the next two days. If the political parties make an open declaration that cricket will be left out of any political activities, it will really help us," said BCB's acting CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury yesterday.

There has been talk about how growing political unrest in the country may put the upcoming cricketing events -- the Asia Cup and the ICC World Twenty20 -- in

Bangladesh in danger. The security issue has become a pertinent talking point after the withdrawal of the West Indies under-19 team from their seven-match youth ODI series following an explosion near the team hotel in Chittagong.

"We have still not gotten a negative response from anybody regarding our next home series against Sri Lanka, the Asia Cup and the T20 World Cup. But as you know a meeting of the Asian Cricket Council [ACC] will take place on January 4 and the ICC [International Cricket Council] meeting will follow it. Questions about security may be raised during those meetings and it will be helpful if we get a positive response from the political parties," added Nizamuddin.

Bangladesh's busy international schedule in 2014 will begin with the series against Sri Lanka, who are scheduled to arrive in Dhaka on January 24 to play two Tests, three ODIs and two T20 Internationals. The series will be followed by the Asia Cup in February and the ICC World Twenty20 in March-April.

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A 15-member Bangladesh Under-19 team was announced yesterday for the Asia Cup to be held in the UAE.

The Mehidy Hasan Miraz-led team will leave for Dubai tomorrow to compete in the continental tournament.

The selectors kept faith on the same team picked for the home series against West Indies Under-19, the only change being the inclusion of an additional wicketkeeper-batsman in Prosenjit Das.

Bangladesh have been placed in Group B along with Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Malaysia while India, Pakistan, Nepal and UAE form Group A.

In an unexpected result in the last edition of the tournament in 2012, Bangladesh were knocked out in the group stage after Afghanistan beat them to reach the semifinals, so fans

will be eager to see how the young Tigers erase those bitter memories this time around.

The junior team selector Sajjad Ahmed however said that they have done a little homework on Afghanistan under-19s.

"There are a few older players on whom we did some homework through video analysis. But we are confident that this team will perform well as the conditions there are more or less similar to ours," said Sajjad.

The team however were frustrated with their lack of match practice as they could only play one match out of

seven one-dayers against West Indies U-19 side earlier this month.

"Our confidence might have been higher had we played all the games against West Indies. It's unfortunate because we were deprived of a good chance to prepare ourselves in a much better way," said captain Miraz.

The young Tigers aim to at least reach the final. A good showing in the Asia Cup will help them play good cricket in the next World Cup which will also held in the UAE.

Bangladesh will play their first group match against Malaysia on December 28 at the Abu Dhabi Oval 1, where they will also play their next game against Afghanistan on the following day. Bangladesh will play their last group match against Sri Lanka on December 31 at the Sheikh Zayed Cricket Stadium in Abu Dhabi.

The semifinals are slated for January 2 and the final will take place at the Sharjah Cricket Stadium on January 4.

SQUAD

Mehidy Hassan Miraz (Captain), Shadman Islam, Najmul Hossain, Yasir Ali Chowdhury, Musaddek Hossain, Saeed Sarker, Joyraj Sheik, Mohammed Jasim Uddin (Vice Captain), Abu Hider, Rifat Pradhan, Mustafizur Rahman, Nihad-Uz-Zaman, Rahatul Ferdous Javed, Jubair Hossain and Prosenjit Das.

Indians instead of Pakistanis

SPORTS REPORTER

The top hockey clubs of Dhaka are seemingly taking a u-turn on their decision to recruit Pakistani players and are considering Indian players instead in light of the strained diplomatic relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan over the execution of war criminal Abdul Quader Mollah.

The top clubs usually bank on the Pakistani players to fill their foreign player quota and initially that was the case this time too.

In the absence of Mohammedan SC and Dhaka Mariner Youngs Club, the other two giants Abahani and Usha KC had initially communicated with Pakistani players, but are now having to look for players from India for the season, which starts with the Club Cup on January 7 followed by the Premier Division League, as they feel they cannot ensure the security of Pakistani players in the current context.

"We had communicated with Pakistani coach Rana Jahir, who was in charge of the club last time, along with a few Pakistani players but we had to drop that idea due to the change in scenario," said Usha KC manager Rafiqul Islam Kamal. "We have already contacted four Indian players through Indian coach AK Bansal but nothing has been finalised yet."

Further explaining the reason behind dropping their plan of signing up Pakistani players, the former national forward, Kamal, said, "It is a question of ensuring the security of the Pakistani players which we cannot ensure on our own. Besides, we don't know whether the Pakistani players will get visas for Bangladesh in time. That's why we are looking for the Indian players."

Like Usha KC, giants Abahani are also communicating with an Indian agent to get the players for the Club Cup and Premier Division Hockey League despite having confirmed four Pakistani players earlier.

"We had confirmed four Pakistani players, but now we have started communicating with the Indian players as we cannot ensure security for the Pakistani players in light of the deteriorating ties between the two countries. Since the Club Cup and the league will be completed within a short span of time, we will make do with the Indian players that we can get," said Abahani's adviser coach Mahbub Harun yesterday, adding that the club is yet to take a final decision on the issue.

However, it has been learnt from the club officials that the Pakistani players are also not too intent on coming to Bangladesh in the current situation even though there is no embargo from either the Bangladesh Hockey Federation or the government on Pakistani players playing in Bangladesh.



Australia's Steven Smith (L) practises slip-catching while wicketkeeper Brad Haddin looks on during a fielding drill in Melbourne on Tuesday.

PHOTO: CRICINFO

Granny smells something 'nasty'

AFP, Newcastle

Graeme Swann's grandmother has blamed unwelcome Australians for the spinner's sudden retirement and said something "nasty" must have happened to convince the England star to turn his back on the Ashes.

"There is something gone wrong there and I blame the Australian players. Not all the Australian players, a certain one," Mina Swann, 89, told The Journal newspaper in Newcastle.

Clarke's twin targets

AFP, Melbourne

Michael Clarke vowed Tuesday to lead an all-out assault on England as Australia go for a 5-0 Ashes series triumph, targeting the top spot in

Test cricket.

"People have been asking me how we're going to approach the Boxing Day Test after already winning back the Ashes," skipper Clarke wrote in his Tuesday column for The Telegraph.

"The answer is easy -- full throttle," he said in what the daily called the "blueprint for Ashes whitewash."

"Momentum is a rare and precious commodity. When you have it you run with it as hard as you can because you're never sure how long it will last."

Clarke has taken Australia to victory

in the opening three Tests, ending England's recent Ashes dominance.

"Now that we're starting to win again it would be silly to take our foot off the gas," he said.

Wicketkeeper Brad Haddin said the team were preparing in the same fighting spirit as the previous Tests despite having clinched the series.

"You never take a Test match for granted, I've never played in a dead rubber and that's from the bottom of my heart," he said.

"I don't think the feeling in the group's changed since we came together in Brisbane. We've had a clear goal of what we wanted to do as a team and that hasn't changed."

Haddin said the team's plans had always looked beyond the Ashes to cementing the top spot in Test cricket.

I'm good as gold: KP

AFP, Melbourne



Colourful England batsman Kevin Pietersen rebuffed suggestions Tuesday he might be next to quit after Graeme Swann's shock exit and expressed "less than zero" interest in the spinner's retirement saga.

Pietersen, who notched his 100th Test during this Ashes series in Brisbane, also brushed off questions about the tourists' troubled Australia campaign signalling a changing of the guard for the side following Swann's retirement and return home of Jonathan Trott with a stress-related illness.

"I'm 33 years of age, I'm batting as well as I've ever batted," the English linchpin told reporters in Melbourne when asked whether he could be the next to call it a day.

"I'll retire when I can't get up to play for England, I'm good as gold at the moment."

He would not be drawn on the furore over Swann's shock decision to walk away from the team and suggestions that his remarks about some players having "no idea how far up their own backsides they are" were directed at Pietersen.

"I'm not giving any energy to what happened yesterday, the only energy that I've got on this tour left in me is for Melbourne on the 26th, training today, training tomorrow and Sydney," he said.

"We want to challenge ourselves to be the best cricketers we can be as a group, and we hope that end result's to be number one in the world," he said. "That's the path we want to take and a lot of hard work has to go into that. At the moment we're doing all of the right things to do that."

Australia are currently in fifth place in the ICC's Test rankings, while England are two places above them in third behind leaders South Africa and India.

Australia are due to tour South Africa in February and March with Haddin saying that trip would be a "true test" of their current winning form.

"You want to play the best, you're not going to get to number one hiding away and not playing. You've got to beat the best obviously here in our backyard but in theirs as well."

Shakib enjoying Sylhet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Ace all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan has emphasised on more quality cricket stadiums in the country to take the game forward.

Shakib, who is captaining Prime Bank in the four-team Victory Day T20 Cup, also believes that the newly-built Sylhet Divisional Stadium will play a positive role towards improving the game in the region.

"There are a lot of beautiful places in Sylhet where you can roam around, which is why it attracts tourists," said Shakib while talking to local reporters in the lobby of the team hotel. Yesterday was a rest day with Shakib's Prime Bank and Abahani doing some gym work while Mohammedan and UCB BCB XI practised at the venue.

"The pitch is good but outfield needs work. But the tournament was arranged hurriedly, so there was little time to prepare everything but I am really happy with the overall arrangement," said Shakib when asked about the new venue.

NEW ZEALAND ODIs Samuels out of WI side

AFP, Wellington

An injured wrist has ruled batsman Marlon Samuels out of the West Indies one-day squad to face New Zealand, with Chadwick Walton called in as cover, team officials said Tuesday.

West Indies head coach Otis Gibson said Samuels would return home to see if surgery was required on his right wrist, in a major blow for the tourists as they look to bounce back from a 2-0 Test series defeat.

"Marlon's injury is unfortunate at such a tough time for the team, but it gives another player the opportunity to make a name for themselves in this series," he said.

Gibson said Walton, 28, who has played just two one-day internationals back in 2009, had been travelling with the team and would relish any chance he was offered.

The first of five ODIs between New Zealand and the West Indies will take place at Auckland's Eden Park on December 26.

SQUAD

Dwayne Bravo (captain), Tino Best, Darren Bravo, Johnson Charles, Narsingh Deonarine, Kirk Edwards, Jason Holder, Nikita Miller, Sunil Narine, Kieran Powell, Denesh Ramdin, Ravi Rampaul, Darren Sammy, Lendl Simmons, Chadwick Walton.

BJS overcome Swadesh

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

Akash claimed five wickets as Boria Jonokalyan Sangshad (BJS) beat Swadesh Club by 14 runs in the Khan Real Estate First Division Cricket League at the Shaheed Miraz-Tapan Stadium here yesterday.

BJS were all out for 158 runs in 37 overs, with Ashraful scoring highest 36. They then dismissed Swadesh Club for 144 runs in 36 overs. Alok hit the team's highest score of 31.

Akash of the winning team was adjudged player-of-the-match for a five-wicket haul after scoring 22.