

Papon relieved after ICC meet

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan Papon seemed a much more relieved man upon his return to the country from the International Cricket Council's meet in Dubai yesterday.

The meeting, which was another opportunity for the BCB head to meet up with his counterparts from Pakistan and Sri Lanka, yielded positive results regarding their arrival here for their respective series.

Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) stated that they would finalise the tour, for which the team are scheduled to arrive on January 24, after the evaluation of their security team, the likely date of which is January 13. Pakistan Cricket Board, the other party reported to have had reservations regarding security issues, requested additional security.

Speaking to reporters at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport yesterday, Papon said, "After yesterday's meeting (Thursday) I have no tension. I am not worried. They were all positive about playing here. All that remains is the arrival of their security teams. Some of them might ask for a few changes in the security plan, but the games will take place here for sure."

"On the 20th of this month, all the countries participating in the ICC World Twenty20 will send in their teams to assess the scenario here. The Sri Lankan security team though will be coming in a bit earlier," he added.

The president felt that the BCB had done everything that it could to reaffirm Bangladesh's status as hosts for the Asia Cup and the ICC World Twenty20. Now all that remains, according to him, is the execution.

"We have done whatever we could to convince them to come here. We have done our job. Seldom has so many big tournaments taken place in a country at a stretch. Now, it's up to each of us -- the political parties, the government and every one of us -- to ensure its success," said Papon.

Sri Lanka is expected to arrive later this month, to play two Tests, three ODIs and two T20Is. The Asia Cup is expected to begin on February 27 and the ICC World Twenty20 is scheduled to take place between March 16 and April 6.

Tomic first up for Nadal

AFP, Melbourne



World number one Rafael Nadal will play rising Australian star Bernard Tomic in the opening round of the Australian Open in Melbourne.

The Spaniard, who won the tournament in 2009 and missed last year's opening Grand Slam through injury, faces a testing first round encounter against the world number 52.

In the draw made in Melbourne on Friday, Nadal was seeded to face Argentine fifth seed Juan Martin del Potro in the quarters.

Serbia's world number two Novak Djokovic, bidding for his fifth Australian crown and fourth in a row, was drawn to face Swiss Stanislas Wawrinka in the last eight.

Djokovic must first play Slovakia's Lukas Lacko in the opening round in the bottom half of the men's draw.

Britain's three-time runner-up Andy Murray was seeded to face 17-time Grand Slam champion Roger Federer in the quarter-finals in the top half of the draw.

Wimbledon champion Murray will play Japan's Go Soeda first-up. Federer, a four-time winner in Melbourne, meets Australian wild card James Duckworth in the opening round and could face Frenchman Jo-Wilfried Tsonga in the fourth round.

Spanish third seed David Ferrer was drawn to face Czech seventh seed Tomas Berdych in the other quarterfinal.

Pironkova's Sydney surprise

AFP, Sydney

Bulgarian qualifier Tsvetana Pironkova crowned a stunning week of top ten scalps with a straight sets victory over fifth seed Angelique Kerber in the final of the Sydney International Friday.

Pironkova, the world number 107, defeated her third-top-ten ranked opponent of the week with a 6-4, 6-4 win in 96 minutes.

Pironkova became the first women qualifier to win the Sydney International, which is one of the oldest tournaments in the world, for her maiden WTA title.

She reached her debut WTA final with a last four win over second seed Petra Kvitova after beating Italian third seed Sara Errani in the quarter-finals.

The Bulgarian's powerful backhand constantly had the German left-hander under pressure and she finished the stronger despite playing her eighth match in eight days.

Pironkova broke Kerber's service six times and lost her serve four times in a physical contest between two big hitters on the women's circuit.



FAIRYTALE CHAMPION: Tsvetana Pironkova of Bulgaria, ranked 107 in the world, exults after a shock win over Angelique Kerber of Germany in the singles final of the Sydney International yesterday.



Muktijodha Sangsad's Nigerian stopper Eleta Benjamin (C) shapes up to score with a bicycle-kick during their 2-1 win over Team BJMC in the Bangladesh Premier League at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Muktis edge out BJMC

SPORTS REPORTER



Nigerian stopper Eleta Benjamin struck an eye-catching goal to help Muktijodha Sangsad to a hard-fought 2-1 win over Team BJMC in the Bangladesh Premier League at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Midfielder Shafiqul Islam Bipul gave the All Reds a four-minute lead before Benjamin scored with a bicycle-volley from inside the box on the stroke of half time. Nigerian midfielder Samson Iliasu pulled one back for Team BJMC with a dipping shot 15 minutes into the second half.

Fresh from a 1-1 draw against Mohammedan in their previous match, Muktijodha dominated over a depleted BJMC, who had to play without two vital foreign recruits – striker Ismael Bangoura and defender Jean Jules Ikanga. Muktijodha took advantage of the opposition's weakness and went ahead with a strike from Bipul, who drove a low-angular shot

from the edge of the box and found the net even though BJMC 'keeper Ariful Islam got a fingertip on it.

BJMC woke up after conceding the lead and launched a few attacks and earned a couple of free-kicks from the edge of the box. On both occasions, BJMC came close to levelling the margin as a Samson header off a Abdullah Parvez free-kick went narrowly wide while Aminur Rahman Sajib hit the woodwork with a header five minutes before the break.

Muktijodha doubled the margin against the run of play in the 45th minute when captain Maruf Ahmed whipped in a corner which Benjamin controlled on the air before rounding off to take a bicycle kick past goalkeeper Ariful.

BJMC, who came into the game on the back of 2-1 win over Feni Soccer Club, dominated the second half and pulled one goal back in the 60th minute when Samson, availing a lob from Omar Faruk Babu, drove a dipping shot from the edge of the danger area, leaving Muktijodha goalkeeper Liton stunned.

BJMC kept on pressing as they

established their control in the midfield but could not make any clear-cut openings in the remaining time and had to leave the field with their first defeat in two matches.

"We were under pressure in the second half as the players looked a bit relaxed after scoring two early goals," said Muktijodha coach Shafiqul Islam Manik. "We would have had nothing to say had we produced a draw today (Friday) as the match was even."

Manik, however, praised the quality of the goal from Benjamin, who has been playing despite carrying a minor ankle injury. Manik said Benjamin had practised worked on kicks in practice, which paid off in the game.

BJMC captain Saiful Islam said that they dropped three points only because of 'indiscipline on and off the field' as the team management does not take care of the players.

Coach Ali Asgar Nasir informed that his foreign players have not been regular in practice sessions and he could not field all four of them against Muktijodha.

Eng 'desperate' for ODI turnaround

AFP, Melbourne



England go into the opening one-day international in Melbourne on Sunday desperate to salvage some pride, but face a torrid task with a fired-up Australia vowing no let-up after dominating the Ashes.

The first of five matches, a day-nighter, is the first opportunity to see how the shell-shocked tourists progress from their nightmare Test series, with captain Alastair Cook demanding an improvement, and quickly.

"I am desperate to try and turn it around," he said after the 5-0 Ashes whitewash.

"When you strip everything down, every single player has to go back and have a look at themselves, have a look at their techniques. Have a look at the way they've bowled and start rebuilding again.

"And that hunger has to come from within to do it."

The series could see either team reclaim the number one limited-overs world ranking, depending on how India fare when they face New Zealand in a five-match series that begins in Napier on January 19.

India are currently the top-ranked one-day team in the world, followed by Australia and England, with all three building towards next year's 50-over World Cup.

A rattled England head into the series without the experience of Kevin Pietersen and Jimmy Anderson, who have both been rested, with Cook leading a team that has much to prove.

Younis, Misbah fight but Pak still behind

AFP, Dubai



Seasoned batsmen Younis Khan and Misbahul Haq hit resolute half-centuries to take the fight to Sri Lanka in the second Test in Dubai on Friday.

Younis was unbeaten on 62 and Misbah scored 52 not out to help Pakistan reach 132-3, still trailing by 91, at close on the third day at the Dubai stadium pitch which is likely to help spinners on the last two days.

Pakistan still need another 93 runs to avoid an innings defeat and go 1-0 down in the three Test series after the first Test ended in a draw in Abu Dhabi.

Younis and Misbah -- who both hit hundreds in Abu Dhabi last week, came together with Pakistan in dire straits at 19-3. They held the batting together during their unfinished 113-run fourth wicket stand.

Sri Lanka earlier gained a big 223-run lead by scoring 388 in their first knock. Pakistan had made 165 in

SCOREBOARD

PAKISTAN: First innings 165 (Manzoor 73; Pradeep 3-62, Herath 3-26)

SRI LANKA: First innings (overnight 318-4)

Karunaratne lbw b Junaid 32

Silva lbw b Hafeez 95

Sangakkara lbw b Ali 26

Chandimal c Rahat b Junaid 12

M Jayawardene b Ajmal 129

Mathews c Sarfraz b Rahat 42

P Jayawardene b Junaid 9

Herath run out 6

Eranga b Bhatti 14

Lakmal not out 10

Pradeep lbw b Ajmal 3

Extras: (lb-1, lb-7, nb-1, w-1) 10

Total: (All out in 134 overs) 388

Fall of wickets: 1-40, 2-75, 3-88, 4-227, 5-320, 6-341, 7-348, 8-365, 9-377.

Bowler O M R W

Junaid 36 7 102 3

Rahat 36 6 131 2

Ajmal 34 11 56 2

Bhatti 22 3 80 1

Hafeez 6 1 11 1

PAKISTAN: Second innings

Manzoor c Prasanna b Pradeep 6

Shehzad c Prasanna b Herath 9

Hafeez c Prasanna b Pradeep 1

Younis not out 62

Misbah not out 53

Extras: (lb-1) 1

Total: (For 3 wkts in 49 overs) 132

To bat: Shafiq, Sarfraz, Bhatti, Ajmal, Rahat, Junaid.

Fall of wicket: 1-11, 2-12, 3-19.

Bowler O M R W

Lakmal 6 1 19 0

the first innings.

It was paceman Nuwan Pradeep (2-28) who gave Pakistan early wobbles.

Pradeep, who took a career best 3-62 in the first innings, had Mohammad Hafeez (one) caught behind in his second over and in his fourth swung one across Manzoor (six) for wicketkeeper Prasanna Jayawardene to take his seventh catch of the match.

Pakistan had lost opener Ahmed Shehzad in the last over before lunch, caught behind for nine off spinner Rangana Herath.

It was left to Younis and Misbah to fight one more time for Pakistan.

Younis was more cautious, reaching his 28th half-century with a single off Herath and continued to bat solidly during his 142-ball stay, hitting four boundaries.

Misbah completed his 3,000 Test runs when on 10, becoming Pakistan's 15th batsmen to achieve the milestone. The Pakistan captain survived one leg-before referral on one and twice on close catches behind the wicket, once off a miscued hook which went to

Del Potro surges to final

AFP, Sydney

World number five Juan Martin del Potro powered his way into his first Sydney International final with a straight sets demolition of Dmitry Tursunov on Friday.

Del Potro had his big serve firing as he rolled to a 6-4, 6-2 win over the Russian fourth seed in 64 minutes.

Del Potro, the top seed, will face Australian defending champion Bernard Tomic, who wore down Ukraine's Sergiy Stakhovsky in the other semi, 6/7 (4/7), 7-5, 6-3 in 2 hours and 13 minutes.

The first Argentine to reach the Sydney final since David Nalbandian in 2009, del Potro broke Tursunov's serve three times and was formidable on his own service.

He thundered down nine aces, making it 38 aces in his three wins so far in Sydney.

It will be his 25th career final and he is looking to step up for his second major title since downing Roger Federer to win the 2009 US Open in New York.

"It is one of my biggest challenges for this season," he said.