

What to WATCH

SONY SIX

Pakistan v Australia

First ODI

Live from 5:00pm

South Africa v Sri Lanka

Second T20I

DAY'S EVENT

Dhaka Premier League

Time: 9:00am

Abahani v Prime Bank

Venue: KSOAS, Fatullah

Sheikh Jamal v Mohammedan

Venue: BKSP-3, Savar

Legends of Rugbanj v Gazi Group

Venue: SBNS, Dhaka

TEN 2

Euro Qualifiers

England v Czech Republic

Live from 1:45am (Saturday)

RONALDO FINED BY UEFA

Cristiano Ronaldo was fined 20,000 euros (\$22,738) by UEFA on Thursday for mimicking Atletico Madrid coach Diego Simeone's crotch-grabbing celebration in Juventus' Champions League last-16 win last week. The 34-year-old scored a second-leg hat-trick as the Italian champions overturned a 2-0 first-leg deficit to progress to the quarter-finals. He replicated Simeone's gesture after the first game by grasping his genitals and thrusting out his groin following his tie-winning penalty. Argentinian Simeone was also fined 20,000 euros by UEFA for his celebration, with European football's governing body following suit in Ronaldo's case. "He will have seen how I did it at the Wanda Metropolitano and, like me, was trying to show his character," Simeone said after the match. Ronaldo, who returns to Portugal international duty after a nine-month absence later on Thursday, has scored 24 goals for Juventus. --AFP



U-23s take on Bahrain today

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh would look to make a positive start to their AFC U-23 Championship Qualifiers campaign when they take on hosts Bahrain in their first fixture of Group B today. The match will get underway at the Khalifa Sports City Stadium in Isa Town of Bahrain at 10:00pm Bangladesh time.

Although these two sides hardly meet at the international stage, their most recent encounter was in the group stages of the 2016 edition of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup, with the match ending in a 1-1 draw. The Bahrain under-23 team, however, went on to beat Bangladesh's senior team in the semifinals of the same tournament.

Both the Bangladesh Olympic team and Bahrain Olympic team were eliminated from the last 16 of the Asian Games in Indonesia last year. Nevertheless, Bahrain under-23 team's performances in recent times have been pretty impressive.

Bangladesh, too, are in good spirits as they wrapped up an eight-day conditioning camp in Qatar on Wednesday with a draw and a win against the under-23 teams of two Qatari clubs. The team reached Doha later that night and had their official training session at the match venue last night.

After the game against Bahrain, Bangladesh will take on Palestine and Sri Lanka on March 24 and 26 respectively. The 11 group champions and four best runners-up teams will join hosts Thailand in the final round of this championship to be held next year.



Germany midfielder Leon Goretzka (L) scored a 69th-minute equaliser to cancel out red-hot Serbian striker Luka Jovic's 12th-minute goal and salvage a draw for Joachim Loew's new-look side in an international friendly at the Volkswagen Arena in Wolfsburg on Wednesday night.

PHOTO: DFB

Goretzka spares blushes

AFP, Berlin

Leon Goretzka spared coach Joachim Loew humiliating defeat with a second-half equaliser as a new-look Germany side were held to a 1-1 draw in Wednesday's friendly against Serbia.

Having controversially dropped veterans Jerome Boateng, Mats Hummels and Thomas Mueller from the national squad two weeks ago, coach Loew had announced the beginning of a "new era" ahead of Wednesday's game.

"I was generally happy with the performance. You could see that there were a few communication problems, but that is something which improves with experience at this level," Loew told German broadcaster RTL after the game.

The young Germany side looked comfortable in the opening exchanges, but Serbia scored with their first chance on 12 minutes.

A fortunate deflection at a corner found Luka Jovic unmarked in front of goal, and the Eintracht Frankfurt striker nodded the ball past Manuel Neuer.

Germany brought on Marco Reus and Leon Goretzka in the second half, and set about grinding down a solid Serbian defence.

On the odd occasion Germany did break through, Serbian goalkeeper Marko Dmitrovic frustrated the hosts with strong saves.

But after Leroy Sane and Ilkay Gundogan failed to take chances, Goretzka equalised on 69 minutes, lashing the ball past Dmitrovic from the edge of the box.

"Generally, when we have the ball on the wings, I try to find space between the penalty spot and the edge of the area, and on this occasion I struck the ball really well," Goretzka told RTL.

Saif SC-Ctg Abahani tie under scanner

SPORTS REPORTER

The Match-fixing Identification Committee of the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) yesterday called three players each from Saif Sporting Club and Chittagong Abahani for their 'suspicious behaviour' during their Bangladesh Premier League fixture on February 23.

The match, played at Saif SC's homeground of Shaheed Rafeeq Uddin Stadium in Mymensingh, had ended in a goalless draw.

"The four-member Match-fixing

Identification Committee, headed by ex-secretary Humayun Khalid, had sat for a meeting today. The committee members analysed video footage of that match and seem to have found suspicious behaviour from a number of players of both sides," BFF competitions manager Zaber Bin Ansari told The Daily Star yesterday.

The BFF official also informed that the three players of each club, whom he did not name due to the investigation, have been summoned to meet the committee on Sunday.

It is understood that the committee, after taking interviews of

the players, will prepare a report for the BFF executive committee to decide the fate of the match and the two clubs, if any wrongdoing is found.

Saif SC are currently in fourth position with 17 points from nine matches while Chittagong Abahani are in eighth position with 11 points from same number of matches.

Although the top-tier professional football league as well as the lower leagues had been dogged by allegations of match-fixing in the past, with clubs like Sheikh Jamal, Rahmatganj, among others, being fined and penalised, the scourge of

match-fixing had seemingly ebbed, at least in top-tier football, in recent years.

Hence the sudden disclosure of the match-fixing issue, that too almost a month after the game took place, comes as a bit of a surprise to the football fraternity.

It may be mentioned here the chairman of Saif Sporting Club, Tarafder Ruhul Amin, is also the vice-president of Chittagong Abahani. The industrialist-turned-sports-administrator is expected to run for the president post in BFF polls scheduled for April next year against the incumbent Kazi Salahuddin.



Bangladesh athletes finished with a tally of 38 medals including 22 gold, 10 silver and 6 bronze at the Special Olympics World Games in Abu Dhabi which ended yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

A TOUR MARRED BY CRUELTY, MARKED BY HUMANITY



MAZHAR UDDIN from Christchurch

I can still remember the day before I was set to fly for New Zealand to cover the series between Bangladesh and the Kiwis. I had a detailed meeting with my sports editor regarding my work plan as it was a crucial series for the Tigers.

We saw the tour as a crucial build-up for the ICC World Cup in England in summer 2019 as it would be the last set of international matches before the Tigers leave for Ireland in May for the World Cup lead-in. It was all supposed to be about the cricket.

But Bangladesh were fated to continue their winless record against the hosts in their own backyard. Injuries and batting failures dogged the Tigers, but that was a sideshow by the time the three-match Test series was cut down to a two-Test one because of a tragic event that would have overshadowed even the most resplendent cricket, let alone the rather incoherent cricket Bangladesh were playing.

The second Test in Wellington, like the first in Hamilton, ended in an innings defeat for Bangladesh. Kiwi left-arm seamer Neil Wagner's nine-wicket haul engineered a humiliating defeat on the fifth morning after the first two days were washed out -- a measure of the gulf of class between the sides.

Little did we know that that would be the end of the cricketing portion of the tour. The team, with me and other touring reporters in tow, returned to Christchurch for the third and final Test in the hope of ending a dismal tour with some positives, but what actually transpired would change our lives forever.

Scenes of the 'Black Friday' -- March 15th, the day before the third Test in Christchurch -- are vivid in their detail in my mind, and will very likely not fade over time. After the pre-match press conference at Hagley Oval, skipper Mahmudullah Riyad rushed towards the team bus to join 16 other players and support staff for Jumma prayers.

Bare minutes had passed before, as if in a trance, I was speaking on the phone to Tamim's wavering voice: "Please call the police, there is a shootout going on at the mosque."

I rushed towards the scene without knowing what was happening. I saw a dead body and a

man soaked with blood walking towards me just minutes after the deadly shootout at the mosque. I can still visualise the scared faces of the Bangladesh players, who just came off the bus right opposite the mosque. Mushfiqur Rahim couldn't stop crying. "I saw dead bodies, people are shot down."

Somehow we managed to rush from that place towards the stadium and while the rest of the day passed in a haze, when I went to bed that night, I

couldn't sleep properly. There has not been a single night since that nightmares of dead bodies and blood have not woke me up in a cold sweat.

As a reporter and as a person, it has always been about cricket and the players during international tours, but this New Zealand tour has taught me that cricket is nothing compared to the life. That, for me, is a gift from the Almighty -- the appreciation of remaining alive.

I saw players shaken from the incident at the



The performances from New Zealand's Neil Wagner (Bottom L) and Bangladesh's Tamim Iqbal (Bottom R) should have been the enduring memories. However, the horrific shootings at two mosques in Christchurch near the end of the tour on March 15, which Bangladesh cricketers (Top) barely escaped, is likely what Bangladesh's tour of New Zealand will be remembered for.

PHOTO: AFP / MAZHAR UDDIN

team hotel. Tamim Iqbal, Taijul Islam, Mominul Haque slept over at Mahmudullah's room that night.

There were quite a few occasions when players tried to shift their focus from that incident but it even five minutes did not elapse before talk returned to what they experienced and what could have happened if they reached the mosque just a few minutes earlier.

The team took the return flight the next day and reached home safely, but I remained in Christchurch for the next few days.

On March 16, the day I was supposed to witness the first day of the third Test at The Hagley Oval -- cancelled for obvious reasons -- I was at the Christchurch hospital.

I have seen people at the ICU who were injured during the horrific attack, crying and screaming in pain. I have witnessed the terrible grief imprinted on the faces of the relatives of victims who died in the massacre, waiting to receive the dead bodies of their loved ones.

I can't describe the situation and the atmosphere in words. I felt helpless yet at the same time I thanked the Almighty for the gift of life. There were many times in life that I felt like I was someone who could keep emotions in check in trying times, but that day I could not stop the tears.

I may not have known any of the dead personally, but I realised what humanity is and how it can change a person perception overnight.

I have seen the people of New Zealand crying while paying tribute to the victims outside the botanical garden in Christchurch. There was a sense of apology and genuine regret from every Kiwi about the incident that they never imagined could take place in New Zealand.

Six days have passed after that incident and I can still see the trauma and grief on the streets of Christchurch.

I have attended the Janaza of a few of the victims yesterday and have seen many non-Muslims present, which did not surprise me at all.

The incident may remain as one of the black spots in the history of New Zealand, but I can say with a lot of belief that the people of Christchurch and New Zealand have shown a lot of courage and solidarity, which will keep this peace-loving country the same in the coming days.

Time heals all scars. The players will once again start training and return to the field to perform their national duties and I will also start writing about cricket for my newspaper.

But the tour of New Zealand will remain the turning point of our lives, where we all realised that there is nothing more important than being alive and will always remember those 50 lives monstrously ended on that day.

Illness hits Aus camp

First ODI against Pakistan today

REUTERS, Dubai

Australia all-rounder Glenn Maxwell may be rested from the first one-day international against Pakistan as the tourists recover from a stomach bug that has hit the team in the United Arab Emirates.

Maxwell missed training on Wednesday, two days ahead of Friday's opener in Sharjah.

Spinner Nathan Lyon also missed training on Tuesday with illness but joined his team mates in their Wednesday session and is a good chance to be picked in a dual spinning assault with wrist spinner Adam Zampa.

"The stats from here all suggest that spin takes a bigger impact. I'll expect them to spin," captain Aaron Finch said in comments published by Cricket Australia's website.

"We even saw yesterday the training wickets looked how we expect the middle to play. You're never quite sure though, once there's a bit of traffic on it they start to slow up pretty quick and spin a bit."

"I think that will be a feature, especially the two games in Sharjah."

Paceman Nathan Coulter-Nile re-joined the squad for the five-match series against Pakistan after missing the final three ODIs against India to fly home to Perth for the birth of his second child.

After trailing India 2-0, Australia won the next three games in succession against Virat Kohli's side to claim their first series victory in the format in over two years.



OUTLETS
BAHANI
GULSHAN
BARIDHARA
JFC
UTTARA
DHANMONDI
MIRPUR
BALAKA
DHAKA