

Haq anchors Pakistan after NZ's 449

AFP, Karachi

Opener Imam-ul-Haq anchored Pakistan with a pugnacious half-century as the home team reached 154-3 at the close Tuesday after New Zealand piled up a handy 449 in their first innings of the second Test in Karachi.

At the close of day two, Haq was unbeaten on 74 and Saud Shakeel 13 as the home team need another 96 runs to avoid the follow-on.

Pakistan started chaotically, losing opener Abdullah Shafique (19), Shan Masood (20) and skipper Babar Azam (24) before the Haq-Shakeel stand added 55 runs for the unbroken fourth wicket.

In contrast, New Zealand's tail waggled furiously, with Matt Henry (68 not out) and Ajaz Patel (35) both scoring Test bests as they added an invaluable 104 runs for the last wicket.

Ahmed was the pick of the bowlers with 4-149, while Naseem Shah (3-71) and Agha Salman (3-71) were the other successful bowlers.

The two-match series is tied after the first Test ended in a draw.



Mourners line up the streets of Santos as Brazilian football legend Pele's body was paraded around the city for last respects ahead of his burial at the Memorial Necropole Ecumenical in presence of his family members. More than 230,000 people attended wake for Pele, according to official figures.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Australia eye WTC final

REUTERS, Sydney

A relaxed and confident Australia head into the third and final Test against South Africa in Sydney eyeing a series sweep and a berth in the World Test Championship (WTC) final to cap a dominant home summer.

Pat Cummins's team, who sealed the series with an innings victory in Melbourne last week, can book their place in the WTC decider at The Oval in June with victory at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

Even with pace stalwart Mitchell Starc and all-rounder Cameron Green sidelined by finger injuries, Australia have ample depth and the freedom to experiment leading in to next month's four-Test tour of India.

In recent years, the SCG has not lived up to its spin-friendly billing but ground staff say the pitch should offer turn.

That could mean a role for Ashton Agar in Australia's 11 and a first Test for the left-arm spinner since 2017.

Cummins said selectors had decided on the lineup but would not reveal it until the toss on Wednesday.

The match should offer "a really good prep" for India, the paceman added.

South Africa, beaten in all facets in the Boxing Day Test, have one forced change, with number three Theunis de Bruyn returning home for the birth of his daughter.

Rassie van der Dussen may be in line for a recall, having been replaced by De Bruyn after the series-opening defeat in Brisbane.

Revenue sharing the tonic that BPL needs: Mahmud

SPORTS REPORTER

Professionalism and proper culture are huge facets in making a T20 franchise league tick in the global landscape but the BPL has not found the continuity over the years that was required to bolster the overall quality of the league. One of the key reasons behind that, as BCB director and Khulna Tigers coach Khaled Mahmud pointed out, is the revenue sharing model currently in place.

Alongside the IPL's domination, other T20 leagues such as the Caribbean Premier League (CPL), Australia's Big Bash League, England's T20 Blast and the Pakistan Super League (PSL) have gained in prominence over the years. The rise of more leagues, such as those in South Africa and Dubai, put further stress on the pool of players that are attainable for BPL teams.

A look at the changing names of franchises over the years indicates a problem in terms of creating brand value and Mahmud opined that a revenue-sharing structure was needed to ensure franchises stayed committed in the long-term to building and owning teams. Otherwise, financial losses will lead to an aversion towards continuation.

Since the inception of the BPL, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has not settled on a financial structure nor shown any interest in sharing revenues.

"To be honest, we were only behind the IPL once upon a time. But over time, everyone has taken over. There are many [franchise leagues] that are doing better. It's also true that we haven't gotten too

many good players this time since Dubai and South Africa are doing tournaments and most players that make those teams are later involved in the IPL. Their main aim is to play in the IPL so players obviously want to be involved in leagues where they can catch the attention of the IPL," Mahmud told reporters yesterday.

Players such as Steve Smith and David

forward, stability has to be brought into the tournament and to the franchises too," Mahmud said about the BPL.

"This is where the profit sharing issue comes up. Businessmen spend 10 to 15 crore but what do they get in return? Maybe they are getting sponsors, but considering the current situation in the country, it's not like they are making big bucks.



Warner have previously featured in the BPL alongside a host of big-name T20 players such as Chris Gayle, but none of the franchises have been involved in all editions of the BPL. Despite showing interest, big organisations often do not view the BPL as lucrative over a meaningful course of time.

"I feel that we aren't being able to compete with the market in India. It's not that our franchise owners are making big-budget sides. Three or four years ago, there were two or three teams with big budgets but that number has come down. Looking

"A franchise arrives and stays for one or two years. They make losses of three crore, but after three years, no one is ready to make that kind of loss. If you make a team over eight years, you can make losses for three years before breaking even and ultimately making profit. If that's not the case, not everyone will want to come," he said about the current instability.

Mahmud said that IPL franchises look for talents throughout the year and if BPL franchises can go the same direction, it will benefit the country's cricket tremendously.

Under-21 hockey team eye glory

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh U-21 Hockey team will depart for Oman today to take part in Junior AHF Cup with hopes of becoming champions and securing a place in the AHF Junior Asia Cup in process.

The eight-team tournament, which is also acting as the qualifiers for AHF Junior Asia Cup, is scheduled to be played from January 6 to 12 in Muscat.

Head coach Mamunur Rashid's squad features two national players - forward Raqibul Hasan Rocky and midfielder Prince Lal Samanta.

"Even though it will be tough, our target is to become champions," Rashid told The Daily Star.

"During a two-week preparation, we worked on tactical, technical and the fitness aspects. I think it could have been better had we got a bit more time to prepare," said the former national player, who, however, was relieved that the players came fresh off playing the Hockey Champions Trophy that concluded in November last year.

Bangladesh were drawn in Pool B along with Hong Kong, Sri Lanka and Uzbekistan while Pool A features hosts Oman, Chinese Taipei, Thailand and Indonesia.

A total of five teams will qualify for the AHF Junior Asia Cup and a semifinal berth will be enough to ensure Bangladesh's qualification to the main competition. And coach Mamunur remained confident of achieving the feat.



Abahani scrape past Police

SPORTS REPORTER

Defending champions Abahani were fortunate to begin their Federation Cup campaign on a positive note as an own goal from a Police FC defender was enough to decide their tie at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Flight Lt Matiur Rahman Stadium in Munshiganj yesterday.

Police FC defender Manjurur Rahman Manik saw his attempt to clear an aerial ball end in the back of their own net five minutes from half-time, an error that proved too costly for Police FC.

Abahani made three changes to the squad that registered a hard-fought 3-2 win over Muktiyoddha Sangsad in their last premier league match but the Dhanmondi-based outfit still struggled to penetrate the backline of Police FC, who fielded a completely different eleven in the game after their 0-1 loss to Sheikh Jamal DC in their last league match on Friday.

It was the 12th time champions Abahani who created the first chance of the game when Nabib Newaj Jibon's glancing header narrowly missed.

Police came close to levelling the margin when a shot from Colombian midfielder Mateo Palacios, their only foreign recruit in the eleven, was parried by Abahani goalkeeper Shahidul Alam Sohel as it fell to Police skipper Kamal Barua, who floated it wide from the six-yard box in the 11th minute.

Abahani scored the winner in the 40th minute.

Al Nassr look to 'galacticos' era

AFP, Riyadh

Few expected Cristiano Ronaldo to rock up in Riyadh but Saudi Arabia's Al Nassr came up with the cash when it counted to pull off the biggest coup in Gulf football history.

Despite a stack of domestic titles the Riyadh outfit has seen little success on the wider stage, enjoying their best days in Gulf and Asian competition in the 1990s.

Bulgarian striker Hristo Stoichkov, like Ronaldo a former Ballon d'Or winner, scored the only goal in their finest triumph when Al Nassr, known as "The International", lifted the 1998 Asian Cup Winners Cup.

Al Nassr will now hope Ronaldo, a surprise capture for an estimated 200 million euros until June 2025, can fire them to the Asian Champions League victories enjoyed by rivals Al Hilal and Al Ittihad.

The club is even eyeing other high-profile coups, including Real Madrid's Croatian playmaker Luka Modric and France midfielder N'Golo Kante, said an official who asked not to be named.

"We will celebrate Ronaldo tomorrow and continue to work... towards high-level signings," he said, adding that Al Nassr is looking to put together the "new galacticos".

Stoichkov, who played only two matches, was the last superstar to pull on the shirt of Al Nassr, who were formed as an amateur

team in 1955 and have racked up nine Saudi league titles.

While the resource-rich Gulf has attracted its share of ageing stars, including George Weah, Pep Guardiola and Xavi, the Portuguese - and his enormous salary - is taking the region's football into uncharted waters.

Al Nassr play at Mrsool Park in the Saudi capital, inaugurated in 2015 and has a 25,000 capacity - a far cry from Ronaldo's previous stomping grounds including Real Madrid's 81,000-seat Santiago Bernabeu.

Ronaldo joins a team marshalled by French coach Rudi Garcia that includes Colombian goalkeeper David Ospina, Brazilian midfielder Luiz Gustavo and Cameroonian forward Vincent Aboubakar.

Al Nassr's most distinguished player to date was Majid Abdullah, the legendary striker who scored 72 goals and helped the Saudi national team win the Asian Cup in 1984 and 1988. But their heyday came in the 1990s, winning the Asian Cup Winners' Cup and the Asian Super Cup in 1998 to gain a spot in the inaugural Club World Cup in 2000 and earn their nickname "The Internationals".

Al Nassr have also clinched six King Cups along with three victories each in the Saudi Crown Prince Cup and the Saudi Federation Cup.



Portugal superstar Cristiano Ronaldo poses for pictures with Saudi children as his partner Georgina Rodriguez (R) stand by, upon arrival at a private airport in Riyadh, on the eve of his grand unveiling before thousands of fans at Saudi Arabia's Al Nassr club on Monday.

PHOTO: FACEBOOK