

Rajshahi wait on Ctg



SPORTS REPORTER

Rajshahi set the stage for championship celebration with a thumping 10-wicket victory over Dhaka on the third day of their four-day match in the Ispahani Seventh National Cricket League yesterday.

Rajshahi ended their campaign atop the table with 40 points but their fate hangs on the result of the Chittagong-Barisal match stretched to the fourth and final day. Only a Chittagong win today — against all odds — can deprive Rajshahi from the first-class title.

Barisal were two down for 39 runs at stumps on third day while chasing a modest target of 145 runs set by title contenders Chittagong.

Meanwhile, Sylhet were closing in on their fourth outright win as Khulna posted only a 117-run over-

all lead with just two wickets in hand.

DHAKA-RAJSHAHI

Resuming the day on 15-1, Dhaka who gave up the title chase halfway through the competition crashed to 181 all out at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium.

Pacers Mushfiqur Rahman and Mahbob Alam picked up three wickets each for Rajshahi with Mosharrar Hossain (47) and skipper Al Shahriar (41) showing some resistance.

Rajshahi only required 10 to win and Moniruzzaman notched all the runs including the winning shot off Mosharrar.

BARISAL-CHITTAGONG

Chittagong battled hard on the third day against Barisal by reducing the home team to 39-2. Abul Bashar was batting on seven with Nasiruddin Faruque, who is yet to open his account. Spinner Yasin Arafat, who opened the bowling, took one wicket while left-arm

spinner Ilias Sunny picked up the other.

Earlier, Barisal spinner Bashar ran through the visitors' batting with six wickets for 62 runs as Chittagong were all out for 259 in their second innings. Captain Ehsanul Haque top scored with 63 with good assistance from Faisal Hossain, who made 40.

SYLHET-KHULNA

Half centuries by Sazzadul Hassan (55) and Jamaluddin (57) helped Khulna finish the day on 198-8 after Sylhet's first innings concluded on 329. Sylhet batsman Golam Mabud added just one run to his overnight score of 121.

Hasibul Hossain, one of the leading wicket takers in the competition, had figures of 3-50 including the last two wickets that fell on the day.

SCORES IN BRIEF

RAJSHAHI: 460 and 10 for no

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Mashrafee for match practice

SPORTS REPORTER

To ensure longer-version match practice for Mashrafee Bin Mortuza ahead of the home series against Australia, the national selectors has included the paceman in the Bangladesh A team to play the second and final four-day Test against Sri Lanka A from March 29 at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogra.

The leading Bangladesh new ball bowler had missed the entire four-day domestic first-class competition due to a back injury and was also rested in the recently concluded Test series against Sri Lanka as the selectors did not want to take any kind of risks on him.

"If he finally plays the match, it would be only because of giving him a chance to get back the rhythm in the longer version game ahead of a very important home series against Australia next month," said chief selector Faruque Ahmed yesterday.

The 22-year old right-arm quick, popularly dubbed as Narail Express, who played his last Test against England at Chester-le-Street in June 2005, had to return home from Sri Lanka in August last year for back injury.

"Once again I want to say if he plays we will handle him very carefully because our main objective would be to see his fitness and rhythm in the longer-version game," explained Faruque.

A 13-member squad was announced yesterday for the second Test with Nazmul Hossain, Farhad Reza and Nadif Chowdhury making way for Mashrafee, paceman Mohammad Sharif and off-spinner Jamaluddin Babu.

Faruque also informed that there is hardly any chance to see national team players in the A side for the three-match one-day series against Sri Lanka A.

"We will meet within two days to chalk out the programme for preparation against Australia. There will definitely be a short camp as we will have only a week after picking up the team by March 31," he said.

Squad: Nazmus Sadat, Nafees Iqbal, Tushar Imran (captain), Sakib Al Hasan, Mehrab Hossain Jr, Mushfiqur Rahim (wicketkeeper), Jamaluddin Babu, Mahmudullah Riyad, Shafaq Al Jabir, Tapash Baisya, Enamul Haque Jr, Mashrafee Bin Mortuza and Mohammad Sharif.



Indian actress Aishwarya Rai (C) brings Bollywood flavour to the 2006 Commonwealth Games during the closing ceremony at the Melbourne Cricket Ground on Sunday.

Record eludes hosts

AFP, Melbourne



Mighty Aus-tralia fell agonisingly short of the Commonwealth Games gold medal record on Sunday but the hosts reconfirmed their place as the event's super-power with a huge 84 titles.

Australia's total was just three short of the record they set in Victoria in 1994, and exactly the same as the golds gleaned by England (36), Canada (26) and India (22) combined.

The final day of action saw Natalie Grinham complete a squash treble, their men's field hockey side complete a triple 3-0 win over Pakistan while Natalie Bates and Matthew Hayman took the cycling road races.

But the unlikely figure of slender Canadian gymnast Alexandra Orlando muscled in on the Australian headline grabbers by joining national heroes Ian Thorpe and Susie O'Neill by capturing six gold medals at the same Games.

Australia's bitter rivals New

Zealand won the last gold of the 245-medal Games with a thrilling 60-55 victory in the netball, dethroning the defending champions.

In field hockey, Liam De Young, Luke Doerner and Jamie Dwyer scored the goals that ensured a successful title defence for the Kookaburras who have not lost a match since the sport was introduced to the Games in 1998 at Kuala Lumpur.

Sunday's win, which followed the Australian women's success on Saturday, was secured after a stormy encounter watched by Australian and British premiers John Howard and Tony Blair respectively.

Pakistan's Tariq Aziz was ordered off with a red card after a deliberate foul on Robert Hammond who came off with blood pouring from his mouth.

"My lip will hurt but the gold medal is there forever," said Hammond.

Malaysia claimed the bronze with a 2-0 win over England.

Nineteen-year-old Toronto student Alexandra Orlando earned a place in the record books by snaring six golds in the rhythmic gymnastics and joined Australian swimming stars Ian Thorpe and Susie O'Neill, as well as compatriot

and swimmer Graham Smith, as the only athletes to win six golds at one Games.

Natalie Grinham completed a squash triple gold sweep.

The younger of the two squash-playing sisters teamed up with Joseph Kneipp to take the mixed doubles and then joined sister Rachael, who she beat to take singles gold, for the women's doubles.

England's Peter Nicol and Lee Beachill won the men's doubles gold. India's Sharath Achanta prevailed over William Henzell of Australia for the table tennis men's gold.

In the women's singles final, Singapore's Zhang Xue Ling sprang a surprise over compatriot Li Jia Wei to win gold while Malaysia's Lee Chong Wei and England's Tracey Hallam were crowned king and queen of the badminton courts.

Lee, the world No.2, beat compatriot Wong Choong Hann to win the men's competition while Hallam spoiled the Malaysian party by easing past Wong Mew Choo.

In women's road racing, Natalie Bates and Mathew Hayman brought home the gold for Australia.

Away from the action, a second Games participant was charged

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CURTAIN FALLS ON GAMES

Bollywood lights up Melbourne

AFP, Melbourne

Bollywood came to the Melbourne Cricket Ground (MCG) Sunday when the hosts of the 2010 New Delhi Commonwealth Games staged a spectacular to mark the end of the sporting festival in Australia.

Not to be outdone, the Australians sent in 1,000 Dame Edna Everages waving gladioli as they entered the stadium in massed ranks and rearranged themselves to form a giant pair of spectacles.

The ceremony climaxed with a huge fireworks display, which organisers described as a thank you to the sports-mad city of 3.6 million for their enthusiastic support of the 71-nation games.

Commonwealth Games president Mike Fennell told a global television audience estimated at 1.5 billion that the 18th Commonwealth Games in Melbourne had been an outstanding success.

"You have achieved a level of success that has set new standards for the Commonwealth Games," he said as the 80,000-strong MCG crowd roared its approval.

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Rajshahi bowler Mushfiqur Rahman hi-fives with teammates after claiming a Dhaka wicket during their four-day match at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium on Sunday.



Ronaldinho
(Barcelona's Brazilian super star) "I have the greatest of confidence in him (Ronaldinho). I think people have to respect him for everything he has done for Real Madrid, for the national team and for world football."

Rain sinks first day

REUTERS, Colombo

The first day of opening Test between Sri Lanka and Pakistan was washed out on Sunday after heavy rains in the capital city.

The unseasonal downpours were so heavy that the vast majority of the Sinhalese Sports Club was still submerged under water when the umpires called off play at 1:00pm local time.

The players of both teams remained at the team hotel throughout the morning.

The second and final Test starts on April 3 in Kandy.

Galle to host Tests by Aug

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's cricket authorities are hopeful of the tsunami-hit Galle International Stadium will be ready to host a Test match against South Africa in August.

"We have received a clearance from the government to rebuild the stadium," said K. Mathivanan, a member of Sri Lanka Cricket's interim committee.

"We plan to finish construction by August and that will allow us to play one Test there when South Africa come."

South Africa, scheduled to tour Sri Lanka in August for two Tests, were the last team to play a match at Galle before the December 2004 disaster.

The tsunami destroyed the stadium's main pavilion, including dressing-rooms, and also severely affected the indoor nets.

Independence Day events

SPORTS REPORTER

TENNIS

Amal Ray of Engineer's Club won the men's singles title of the Independence Day Tennis tournament, organised by Bangladesh Tennis Federation (BCF). His opponent in the final Dipu Lal retired early in the second set as Ray. The champion was leading 6-3, 2-1. Hujo Fusoku won the women's singles event, when she beat Ishrat Sultana in straight sets. Khushbu and Arif won the girls' and boys' crown respectively.

BCF general secretary Sanaul

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Nafees rescues BD A



SPORTS REPORTER

Ten wickets tumbled on the final day but Nafees Iqbal's patient 80 helped Bangladesh A salvage a draw against their Sri Lankan counterparts in the first Test yesterday at the BKSP ground.

With the four-day match poised to Sri Lanka A, who resumed the final day on 113-5 with a healthy 227-run overall lead, the home side fought well to bowl out the opposition for 187.

The visitors batted throughout the morning session but captain Jehan Mubarak was left stranded at 99 not out as the last two wickets fell on the same score to deprive him of a pair of centuries in the match. Test cap Mubarak, who scored 140 in the first innings, was 59 overnight and hit five fours and three sixes in his undefeated knock to put the second string Sri Lanka side in command.

However, it looked difficult to dismiss a side in just two sessions even on a wearing out fourth-day pitch and Bangladesh A, despite

early hiccups, reached 180 for five when the match was called off.

Test opener Nafees, who made 18 in the first innings, batted with grit after losing his opening partner Nazmus Sadat (4) in the very first over. Nafees, who cracked 13 boundaries in 137 deliveries before being run out, shared 42 runs with skipper Tushar Imran (17) for the second wicket and exactly 100 for the third wicket with Mehrab Hossain Jr, who dug in deep in a 116-ball 38.

The second four-day Test between the two sides will begin on March 29 at Bogra.

SCORES IN BRIEF

SRI LANKA A: 409 and 187 all out in 72.2 overs (Kalavetigoda 18, Udawait 15, Mubarak 99 n.o., Silva 13, Ganegama 18, Tapash 2-18, Enamul 4-61, Mehrab Jr 1-30, Riyad 2-41).

BANGLADESHA: 295 and 180-5 in 59 overs (Nafees 80, Tushar 17, Mehrab Jr 38, Rahim 10, Farhad 14, Amarasinge 1-26, Herath 2-57, Gajanayake 1-20).

Cruciani curses bad luck

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh national coach Diego Cruciani cursed bad luck just five days ahead of the inaugural AFC Challenge Cup for losing key defenders

Hassan Al Mamun and Sujan but was relieved to know that Rajani Kanta Barman will be available for the 16-nation tournament.

Hassan, the right fullback and the senior most player in the squad who has been suffering from an old knee injury, has already left the camp while Sujan, injured during Brothers Union's AFC Cup match at Manama against Al Muharra, has also been ruled out.

However, team doctors have cleared former captain Rajani, whose presence at the central defence will give Cruciani some peace.

"It's pure bad luck that I have lost

players like Hassan and Sujan. They are irreplaceable. But I have to do with what I have. It's a worry for me as I don't have enough backup in the defence. I can try Nazrul or Faisal with Rajani and have to keep fullback Wali Faisal in the squad, who can play in the middle," Argentine coach Cruciani said yesterday.

The national team lost their first warm-up match to National League winners Mohammedan 2-1 on Saturday but Cruciani said apart from two 'gifted' goals to the opponents, his side played well.

"The midfield is our strength. The young players have responded well in absence of the seniors I have dropped. The attack remains my worry as they have not shown perfection and missing two many chances," he added.

Cruciani will announce his squad on Tuesday after another warm up match against the Under-14 squad.

With SAFF Championship winners India opting to send their youth team under Uzbekistan

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CHALLENGE CUP AFC to follow FIFA model

SPORTS REPORTER

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) will follow the FIFA model for an international tournament when they stage the inaugural AFC Challenge Cup in Bangladesh from April 1-16.

The football governing body in Asia will provide all facilities and employ a host of officials to make the 16-nation meet a success as well as giving the emerging football nations of the continent a stage to perform and raise their level.

A technical study group including four local coaches will analyse every match and provide the teams with information about faults that they can correct and places they have scopes to improve.

Twenty referees including ten assistant referees will conduct matches in capital Dhaka and port city Chittagong in addition of two match commissioners, one disciplinary commissioner, security, marketing and media officers and event managers. General coordinators Saifuddin Bakar and Sathiraj Kelly will be in charge of the tournament while two referee assessors will scrutinise the referees' performance.

Over 600 footballs -- the brand new Aero 90 made by Nike -- will be used during the tournament with 13 balls for every match. Each team will be given ten balls for training.

Meanwhile, teams will start arriving from March 28 with Pakistan first to reach Dhaka. Chinese Taipei, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Brunei, Cambodia and Guam are due on March 29, Macau, and three pre-tournament favourites India, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan on March 30 and Nepal on March 31.

The AFC officials present in Dhaka were satisfied with the renovation works of MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong and said 95 per cent work has been finished.

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Lara sparks Windies



AFP, Napier

A classy 83 from Brian Lara and an unbeaten 70 from Runako Morton carried the West Indies to 256 for four against New Zealand before further rain brought an early end to

the second day of the third and final cricket Test here Sunday.

Only 78 overs have been possible in the first two days, and with more rain forecast over coming days, the chance of an outright decision is becoming remote.

But there has been enough time in the middle for Lara to display his magic after falling in his four previous innings on what will be his last

tour of New Zealand. He rediscovered his classic, flowing stroke-play and as much as New Zealand tried to stack the offside with fielders, Lara's placement was too good as he cracked 12 boundaries.

But as he was marching towards his century the gremlins struck again. He went to pull Astle, but a bottom-edge cannonned into his legs then on to the stumps, and Lara walked on to the stumps to a standing ovation after his 107-ball stand.

His dismissal was followed by the runout of Shivanine Chanderpaul in bizarre circumstances, which saw the West Indies captain and Runako Morton at the same end.

At stumps, Morton was not out 70, his second half-century in consecutive Tests, with Dwayne Bravo on 22.

Chanderpaul was on two when Morton guided a shot to mid-off and set off for what should have been a comfortable single, until Chanderpaul back-pedalled and both ground their bats at the bowler's end when Daniel Vettori broke the stumps at the other end.

A visibly angry Morton slammed his bat into the ground and started to walk when he was initially given out. But, after a lengthy deliberation and numerous television replays showing the comical sight of two batsmen stretching for the same crease, Chanderpaul was ruled out.

After resuming the day at 95 for one, after the rain-shortened first day, the West Indies put on 129 runs and lost three wickets in an extended morning session, and added another 32 runs in the 13 overs available after lunch.

Daren Ganga was the first wicket to fall in the morning, bowled by a full length Shane Bond delivery for 30.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at close of a rain-shortened second day of the third

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West Indies' premier batsman Brian Lara flicks one for four during the second day of the third Test against New Zealand in Napier on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP