



PHOTO: STAR

Barisal opener Hannan Sarkar flicks the ball during their opening match of the National Cricket League against Dhaka at the Fatullah Stadium yesterday.

Mashrafee on fire

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Pace bowlers ruled on a low-scoring opening day of the Ispahani Mirzapore Tea 8th National Cricket League at different venues across the country.

National pacemen Mashrafee Bin Mortuza, Syed Rasel and all-rounder Ziaur Rahman shared nine wickets as Khulna shot out hosts Rajshahi for 127 runs but were then reduced to 40 for two at the Rajshahi Divisional Stadium. At the Fatullah Stadium, young Barisal seamers Sajidul Islam and Ishraq Sonnet shared eight wickets to skittle out Dhaka for 173.

However, play was suspended due to rain at Chittagong Divisional Stadium where the hosts are playing Sylhet. Match Referee Rafiqul Alam and umpires Nadir Shah and Samiur Rahman called off play at 3.30pm after daylong incessant

rain.

RAJSHAHI V KHULNA

Mashrafee, one of several Tigers playing in the opening round, got Khulna off to a dream start as he dismissed Jahurul Islam for a first-ball duck. Left-arm Rasel then chipped in along with all-rounder Ziaur who took three wickets in his first spell.

At one stage, Rajshahi were reduced to 104-7 when captain Khaled Mashud fell bow to Rasel in the middle session for 12.

Mashrafee picked up the final two wickets to end with figures of four for 27 while Ziaur took 3-15 in eleven tight overs. Rasel bagged two wickets while the other went to his Tigers teammate Abdur Razzak.

Only Naeem Islam hung around for a considerable time for the hosts as he top-scored with 37 runs that included five fours and a six. All-rounder Mushfiq Babu was unbeaten on 19.

As Khulna batted, it was evident

that there was enough for the fast bowlers later in the day as left-hander Nazmus Sadat and Sahagir Hossain both fell to left-arm fast bowler Shafaq Al Jabir who ended day one with figures of 2 for 23.

DHAKA V BARISAL

Al Shahriar won the toss for Dhaka but must have rued his decision as his star-studded top-order was undone and were reduced to 90 for five in the first session.

Barisal's young new ball pair of left-armers Sajidul Islam (4-56) and right-arm medium Ishraq Sonnet (4-46) knocked off the likes of Javed Omar (17), Mehrab Hossain (3), skipper Shahriar (3) and the in-form Marshall Ayub (13) to give their side a slender advantage. Dhaka were eventually bowled out for a meagre 173 in 55.1 overs.

Mohammed Ashraf struck five boundaries in a quickfire 29 off 46 balls but tail-ender Shahadat Hossain's 33-ball 37 was the team's top-score as well as the most enter-

taining knock. The tall paceman struck four boundaries and a six in his 49-minute stay at the crease.

Barisal's reply stumbled early as opener Imran Ahmed fell to Shahadat who by now was having a great day. Barisal captain Hannan Sarkar struck five boundaries but his innings terminated after Mohammad Sharif had him plumb in front for 32. Left-hander Nasiruddin Faruq and Mehdi Hasan were the not out batsman with their side on 59 for three at stumps.

SCORES IN BRIEF

RAJSHAHI FIRST INNINGS: 127 all out in 61.4 overs (Jahurul 0, Junaed 6, Farhad 7, Naeem 37, Rahim 10, Rosel 14, Mashud 12, Mushfiq 19*, Shuvo 10, Shahjada 1, Jabir 0, extras 11, Mashrafee 4-27, Rasel 2-47, Ziaur 3-15, Razzak 1-25); **KHULNA FIRST INNINGS:** 40-2 in 15 overs (Sadat 2, Sajjadul 2 0*, Sahagir 6,

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PM predicts Aussie win

AFP, London

Prime Minister John Howard predicted Thursday that Australia would regain the Ashes but welcomed the return of "the old rivalry" to the series in recent years in a BBC interview.

Speaking before England's first match on the Ashes tour against a Prime Minister's XI in Canberra, Howard said he was hoping for a close competition.

The self-confessed "cricket tragic" told BBC radio: "I think every cricket lover would like to see it close."

"I expect Australia to regain the Ashes. I'm not only hopeful but I'm confident."

He predicted that England would miss injured players Michael Vaughan, who captained England to victory in the 2005 series, and fast bowler Simon Jones and said he was looking forward to the matches getting underway.

"There is nothing quite like a keenly fought Test cricket series between England and Australia."

"With all due respects to all other sports, and they're wonderful and I love them all, but nothing quite like that," he said.

Martyn now apologises

CRICINFO, undated

Damien Martyn, the man at the centre of the controversy where he pushed BCCI chief Sharad Pawar off the podium after Australia beat West Indies to win their first Champions Trophy title, has apologised for his actions.

"I didn't mean to offend him and I apologise if I did so," Martyn told an Australian paper. "There was nothing in it other than me trying to help him out as there was a crush of people."

Martyn's actions, along with those of his captain Ricky Ponting, have drawn strong reactions from Indian officials, former and present Indian players and media who called the Aussies "rude and arrogant".

James Sutherland, Cricket Australia chief executive and Ponting were trying desperately to contact Pawar by phone in a bid to ease the tension.

The Australian board is investigating the matter further and has not ruled out reprimanding Martyn.

Narayanganj surprise leaders

SPORTS REPORTER

Narayanganj Chess Club became surprise leaders in the Dutch-Bangla Bank First Division Chess League after five rounds when they defeated Toyota Motors Chess Club 3.5-0.5 at the Chess Federation hall-room yesterday.

The Narayanganj outfit led the table with 15 points after previous-round table-toppers Biman conceded valuable points in a 2-2 draw with Destiny 2000 Limited. Biman have 14 points but they have a match in hand to recover.

Biman's star-studded lineup put on a disappointing show as Grandmaster Ziaur Rahman lost to FIDE Master Sheikh Nasir Ahmed

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Rakib sinks Kurigram

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

Rakib scalped six wickets as Nilphamari defeated Kurigram by 78 runs in the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) Young Tigers under-14 tournament at the Gaibandha Stadium yesterday.

Winning the toss, Nilphamari rode on Emran's 52 before being bowled out for 139 in 34.4 overs. Kurigram could only muster 61 runs before losing all their wickets in the 16th over.

Hosts Gaibandha faces Kurigram in today's match at the same venue.

Arif inspires Netrokona

UNB, Sherpur

Netrokona beat Sherpur by 35 runs in a low-scoring affair in the BCB Young Tigers under-18 cricket tournament at the Shaheed Smriti Muktijoddha Stadium here on Thursday.

Batting first after winning the toss, Netrokona were all out for 117 in 42.1 overs with Dipankar scoring 34 runs. Arif claimed seven wickets for 25 runs to be adjudged man of the match.

In reply, hosts Sherpur were dismissed for a cheaply 42 in 23.2 overs. Shafiqul and Pappu captured four wickets each conceding 29 and 31 runs respectively.

Nimbus makes stakes high

Cricket

BISHWAJIT ROY

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has got a huge financial boost when Nimbus Sports International made a bid of 56.88 million dollars for the board's Worldwide Marketing Agency rights yesterday.

After a daylong drama the fact unfolded when the BCB officials, led by president Ali Asghar, announced Nimbus's name as the highest bidder between two India-based agencies for television, internet and other rights for the next six years -- November 1, 2006 to March 31, 2012.

The tenders were opened at a local hotel last night and the other competitor Zee Network was behind by far, having made a bid of a meagre 35.3 million dollars.

But BCB has to wait for government clearance to finalise the deal as the sports ministry, which on

Wednesday barred the board from progressing regarding the TV deal, changed its view yesterday after discussion with the board officials.

The sports ministry yesterday afternoon only allowed the board to continue with the procedure but not making the final deal without its approval.

"We realised after discussion with the board officials that it should go ahead with the procedures of the deal. Our adviser (CM Shafi Sami) has taken counsel from experts and partially changed the previous order," said Mohammad Idris Miah, joint secretary of youth and sports ministry, who along with deputy secretary Mohammad Raisul Alam Mondal, was present during the opening of the tenders.

"What we have seen so far there has been nothing shady in the procedure. We are happy with the process. We think that revising the order has saved Bangladesh cricket from a possible disaster," he added.

Despite the last moment has-

sles, the BCB high-ups were overwhelmed in the end as they believed that it was a milestone in not only cricket but also in sport history of the country.

"I think it's a great achievement in our sports history and the deal worth over 400 crore taka only reflected that our cricket is in the right direction. It actually exceeded our expectation. You just imagine how it jumped from our previous amount of 11.75 million dollars," said Asghar.

"We are really excited with the outcome. This time we will decide about the production and the cost will not exceed 11 million dollars. Besides, the Board holds the terrestrial rights. As per the clause they will also telecast 10 days of domestic cricket every season and it will increase to 15 days after the first three years," informed general secretary Mahbul Anam, who believed that they had taken a legal

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PHOTO: AFP

DON'T TRY TO WIN HERE! Australia Prime Minister John Howard (C) greets England captain Andrew Flintoff during a reception at The Lodge in Canberra yesterday.

Shoaib slapped Bob?

Cricket

AFP, Lahore

Cricketer Shoaib Akhtar has denied charges by the Pakistan team's security officer that he slapped coach Bob Woolmer, misbehaved in a disco and banged on Indian coach Greg Chappell's hotel door.

Anil Kaul, a retired Indian army colonel who served as the Pakistani team's security officer during the Champions Trophy, said the incidents took place in Jaipur ahead of Pakistan's first match on October 17.

"During a bus journey there was an impasse over whether to listen to Indian or western music. Woolmer tried to crack a joke on Shoaib, who then slapped him on the neck," Kaul told NDTV news channel Thursday.

Two days later, Shoaib and fellow fast bowler Mohammad Asif were called home by the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) after they tested positive for the banned steroid nandrolone.

Woolmer denied the slapping incident, but admitted there had been a disciplinary problem with Shoaib, without elaborating.

"The issue is being blown out of proportion," the Englishman told the channel. "I don't know who is spreading these rumours."

"But I will concede there was a disciplinary issue when Shoaib was up in the evening, so we had a little bit of a problem," he said.

Kaul also said Shoaib had to be pulled out of a discotheque by security staff after he insisted on dancing with one particular girl and then created chaos in the corridors of the hotel.

"Shoaib went to the floor where the Indian team was staying and started banging on the doors," said Kaul. "He accidentally banged on the door of Indian coach Greg Chappell and his wife came out, dressed in her night clothes."

"Shoaib made some comments about her. The next morning, I was having breakfast with the Pakistani team manager when Woolmer stormed in."

"He said even Chappell has complained about Shoaib and strict action must be taken."

Shoaib, whose cricketing future is in doubt after he was handed a two-year ban after his positive drugs test, vehemently denied the charges made by Kaul.

"No such incident took place,"

he told the channel. "I am surprised how you can say such things without any proof."

Pakistan team manager Talat Ali also denied the accusations, which were on the front pages of most Indian newspapers on Thursday.

"I categorically deny any such incident," said Ali. "It has got nothing to do with the doping test. This incident never happened."

The PCB said Thursday it would lodge a complaint at the International Cricket Council (ICC) against the security officer.

"We will demand Kaul be banned for any future assignments with the Indian board or the ICC," PCB operations director Saleem Altaf said.

"The issue is not whether the allegations are true or not, the issue is that Mr. Kaul has violated the strict secrecy code which is a must for all match and team officials at any time," Altaf told reporters.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) on Thursday distanced itself from Kaul, saying he was appointed to the job by the ICC, which organised the Champions Trophy.

"As the tournament director, I wish to clarify that the BCCI did not

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Did U Know?

Jeanne-Genevieve Gaminier was the first female parachutist, jumping from a hot air balloon in 1799.



TALK TURKEY



Bob Woolmer

(Pakistan cricket coach)
"I remember Lara said 'Sorry Bob this is my day' when West Indies had the better of us and I hope I can return the favour in the coming Test series. We would like to spoil his party but for that we have to play good cricket."

Recalling Lara's joke with him before West Indies upstaged South Africa in the quarterfinal of the 1996 World Cup, Woolmer made his intentions clear about the upcoming three-Test series against West Indies.



ESPN
Sportscentre India
Sports News
Live at 8:30 pm

Abahani end on a high

Hockey

SPORTS REPORTER

The Green Delta Premier Hockey League match between Abahani and Usha Krita Chakra, abandoned on Wednesday after 58 minutes due to crowd violence and inadequate light, ended yesterday. There was no further chaos as the remaining 12 minutes of the match was completed according to the bylaws.

And it were Abahani, leading 1-0 on Wednesday through a 41st minute strike by Russell Mahmud

Jimmy, who had the last laugh in the first-leg finale with a 2-0 victory over the defending champions at the Maulana Bhasani National Hockey Stadium.

Abahani took the field one man down due to Khokon's yellow card that saw him sidelined for the first five minutes after the match resumed. However, before the sky-blues defender could return, Indian recruit Prakash Chalke sealed the fate of the crucial match with a 62nd minute goal.

Like the previous day, local hero Jimmy and Indian duo Dhanraj Pillay and Prakash were in the heart of Abahani's second goal.

Usha went all-out in search of an equaliser but were caught on the counter attack as former international and superstar Pillay created an opening with a long through. Jimmy picked the ball at the right flank and quickly switched the ball across to Prakash whose rising reverse hit from the left side of the box gave Usha keeper Zahid no chance to react.

A victory for Usha would have placed the old-Dhaka outfit comfortably placed with a six-point lead in the Super Five, which kicks off today.

But following Usha's maiden

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PHOTO: AFP

West Indies batsman Dwayne Bravo salutes the crowd after scoring a century on the second and final day of a two-day tour match against Pakistan Cricket Board Patron's XI at Lahore yesterday.