

Barisal floor Khulna Dhaka escape Kapali's web



SPORTS REPORTER

Dhaka's tailenders denied Sylhet two certain points when the Ispahani Sixth National Cricket League leaders survived Alok Kapali's spinning web on the final day of their seventeenth-round four-day match yesterday.

Both sides collected two points from the rain-interrupted match according to the by-laws as one side could not complete their first innings at the Sylhet Stadium.

Dhaka, on 32 points, have now opened up a eight-point lead over second-placed Rajshahi while Sylhet slipped to bottom of the table along with Barisal and Khulna, all three on 16 points.

Also Thursday, Barisal crushed neighbours Khulna by 260 runs for their first outright victory in the tournament. Chittagong, who lost to Rajshahi in the seventh round, are third with 20 points.

SYLHET-DHAKA

Skipper Alok Kapali responded to his omission from England-bound preliminary squad, by capturing seven for 81 as Sylhet pressed to

take a first innings lead in a bid for four points but Dhaka's lower-order held the fort to reach 282-9 at close of play.

In reply to Sylhet's first innings total of 313, Dhaka resumed on two for no loss and lost opener Anwar Hossain without any addition to the total.

Opener Rashedul Haque (41) and one-down Javed Omar (48) added 80 runs for the second wicket before national discard Kapali began his career-best spell, destroying the defending champions' middle-order in the final two sessions.

Dhaka slumped to 125-6, losing five wickets in 13 overs, but Mahmudullah Riayadh and Mehrab Hossain halted the slide during a 70-run stand for the seventh wicket.

Riyadh made a patient 48 from 102 balls while former national opener Mehrab, who came to bat at number eight, scored a more sedate 51 from 153 deliveries.

Kapali's legbreaks again brought Sylhet back into contention when he removed both batsmen but Dhaka's last pair Anwar Munir and Dipojjal saw off the remaining six overs during an unbroken 19-run stand for the last wicket.

Kapali, who bowled 30 overs in a row after scoring 54 in the Sylhet innings, was adjudged man-of-the-

match.

BARISAL-KHULNA

Away at the Barisal Stadium, Nadif Chowdhury picked the last five wickets as the hosts shot out Khulna for 167 in their second innings.

Overnight 210-4, Barisal batted 19 overs in the morning before declaring their second innings on 269-8.

Set an improbable 428-run victory target, Habibul Bashar's men skittled out in just 49 overs with some resistance coming from wicketkeeper Sahagir Hossain (42) and Manzarul Islam (41). They lost their last five wickets for just 30 runs in 12 overs as left-arm spinner Nadif reaped through the tail.

Nadif, adjudged man-of-the-match finished with a match haul of nine for 97 after taking 5-58 in the second innings.

SCORES IN BRIEF

SYLHET-DHAKA

Sylhet: 313

Dhaka: 282-9 in 102 overs (Rashedul 41, Anwar 1, Javed 48, Mehrab Jr 1, Ashraf 18, Mahmud 2, Riyadh 48, Mehrab 51, talha 19, Munir 6 n.o., Dipojjal 6 n.o., extras 36, Nazmul 1-23, Rezaul 1-27, Kapali 7-81).

Result: Match drawn

SEE PAGE 17 COL 4



STAR AGAIN! Photographers take snaps of Pakistan all-rounder Shahed Afridi and his teammates on their arrival at Cochin International Airport yesterday. Afridi has made a memorable return to the Pakistan side after months in the wilderness.

PHOTO: AFP



Virender Sehwag's innings of 201 is the highest for India against Pakistan at Bangalore. The only other century for India against Pakistan at this venue was Sunil Gavaskar -- an unbeaten 103 in 1983-84.



Jose Mourinho

(Chelsea manager)

"If Roman Abramovich helped me out in training we would be bottom of the league and if I had to work in his world of big business, we would be bankrupt."



TEN Sports

West Indies v South Africa

First Test, Day Two

Live at 8 pm

ESPN

Sportscentre

Live at 8.30 pm

English Premier League Preview

Taped version at 9 pm

Here We Go

Same Day Delay at 10.30 pm

STAR Sports

Sportslive

Live at 8 pm

StanChart school cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Six matches of the Standard Chartered Young Tigers National School Cricket Championship were washed out yesterday due to inclement weather.

In the day's two rain-curtailed matches, Loreeto (153-7) defeated Bir Shreshtha Abdur Rouf Rifles (85) by 68 runs at the Dhanmondi Club ground while Maple Leaf International (202) beat Dhanmondi Tutorial (164-6) by 38 runs at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium.

About time he scored big



AGENCIES, Cochin

Out-of-form India captain Sourav Ganguly will be under pressure to retain his job in a six-match one-day series against Pakistan starting on Saturday.

The 32-year-old, having a torrid time with the bat, has come under severe criticism from fans and former players after failing throughout the Test series, which ended in a 1-1 draw earlier this week. He had a miserable average of 9.6 in the three matches.

Former skipper Bishen Singh Bedi has said he should be dropped and a new captain appointed.

He, however, found a legendary supporter in Kapil Dev, who said Ganguly should continue as captain despite his dismal run of form in the Test.

Also a former skipper Dev told BBC: "I don't think there's anything wrong with his captaincy."

"The last 10 years India's management have been more sensible. I hope they don't make an irrational decision."

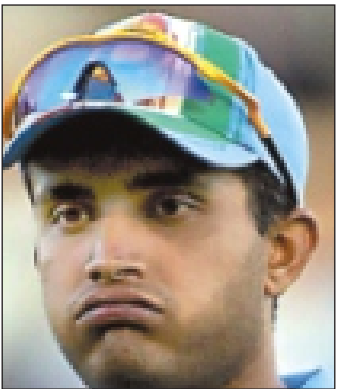
Dashing opener Virender Sehwag, however, also defended him.

"I have always found Sourav to be a positive captain," he said. "Whatever his personal form, whatever the media writes about him, he has always been strong, focussed and aggressive at team meetings. Perhaps these are the qualities that

make him India's most successful captain."

Public opinion has turned so strongly against Ganguly that he was booed by the crowd on his way to the crease in both innings in the final Test in Bangalore.

As often happens in India, however, the mood could change quickly if he leads the way for a resounding one-day series win



SOURAV GANGULY

against the cross-border rivals.

It is not the lack of Test runs over recent months but the manner of dismissals that have put Ganguly in the firing line.

The Indian skipper was particularly shaky in Bangalore, where Pakistan won the match to level the series.

He was stumped in the first innings, totally foxed by a googly

from leg-spinner Danish Kaneria, and bowled between bat and pad in the second while sloppily driving at a big turner from occasional leg-spinner Shahid Afridi.

The third Test loss to Pakistan, which cricket-crazy Indian fans hate more than anything, has got them baying for his blood.

Ganguly's Test form has, at best, been scratchy over the last two years. But in one-dayers, he remains a force to be reckoned with.

What could work in Ganguly's favour is that India play no Test till an away series in Zimbabwe in October, giving him enough time to redeem himself with big performances in the shorter version of the game. His 22 one-day centuries are second only to teammate Sachin Tendulkar and though the last 100 came back at the 2003 World Cup, there have been nine half-centuries since then.

With Tendulkar, Virender Sehwag, Rahul Dravid, Ganguly, Yuvraj Singh and Mohammad Kaif in the lineup, India will start the one-dayers as slight favourites.

But Pakistan are on a high after their Bangalore Test win and their batting lineup, comprising Shahid Afridi, Shoab Malik, Inzamamul Haq, Yousis Khan and Yousuf Youhana, is in fine shape.

India won a thrilling five-match series 3-2 in Pakistan last year and this one could go down to the wire as well.

Ganguly will desperately hope his team wins. Another disappointing loss could mean the end of the road for him.

Delhi may lose the final ODI

AFP, New Delhi

A one-day international between Pakistan and India that Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf was due to attend is unlikely to be held in New Delhi for security reasons, a cricket official said Thursday.

"It will be difficult for us to meet the conditions of municipal authorities and security agencies and we have decided to convey the same to the Indian cricket board," Delhi cricket chief Arun Jaitley told reporters.

Musharraf was expected to fly in for the sixth and final match of the upcoming one-day series between India and Pakistan, which was to be held at the Ferozeshah Kotla ground on April 17.

The stadium was being rebuilt and cricket officials had decided to reduce the capacity to 30,000 for the match, saying spectators would be allowed to occupy only the lower half of the two-tiered galleries.

"It is now up to the Board of Control for Cricket in India to take a decision regarding the status of the match," said Jaitley.

The series was originally proposed to be of five one-dayers but a sixth was added to the itinerary to accommodate Ahmedabad as a venue after Pakistan refused to play a Test in the western city because of security concerns.

Pakistan foreign office spokesman Jalil Abbas Jilani said Islamabad was still waiting to hear from India about the development.

No sympathy for Ganguly



AFP, Cochin

Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq on Thursday warned there will be no respite for his beleaguered Indian counterpart Sourav Ganguly during the upcoming one-day series.

"All players go through such bad patches and I will do everything to maintain pressure on him," Inzamam told AFP ahead of the first of six one-dayers here on Saturday. "There will be no sympathy for him."

Ganguly's wretched form with the bat was the talking point after Pakistan surprised the hosts with a 168-run win in the third and final Test in Bangalore to draw the series 1-1.

Ganguly, India's most successful Test captain with 19 wins, has struggled to justify his place in the team as a batsman.

The left-hander's last century came against Australia at Brisbane in December 2003 and he could only manage scores of 21, 12, 12, two and one in five innings against Pakistan in the recent Test series.

"I want to capitalise on the pressure. We want to ensure he struggles in the one-dayers too," said the Pakistan captain, who slammed a brilliant 184 at Bangalore in his 100th Test appearance.

In contrast to Ganguly, Inzamam led from the front, scoring 401 runs at an average of 80.20 and helped the underdogs pull off a gritty win in

the final Test after losing the second match in Kolkata by 195 runs.

Inzamam said it was always good if the opposition team's captain was not in good form.

"That adds to the pressure. Our one-day record is better and we plan to play positive and attacking cricket," said the skipper, under whom Pakistan have beaten India in the last four one-dayers.



INZAMAMUL HAQ

Inzamam, however, cautioned his team against complacency.

"Levelling the Test series does not mean we will win the one-day series. We will have to maintain the tempo," he said. "I think it will be very exciting cricket."

The Pakistan captain was among five frontline players to miss a practice game at Hyderabad on Wednesday in which the tourists

Mukti off to Turkmenistan today

SPORTS REPORTER

A 16-member MuktiJoddha Sangsad leave Dhaka this afternoon to play their third round match of the AFC Cup against Nebitchi FC of Turkmenistan.

The match will be held at Nebitchi's hometown Balkanbat, some 500 kilometres away from capital Ashgabat on April 6.

Coach Shafiqul Islam Manik already left yesterday and will be joined by the rest of the team in Bangkok.

Despite making a bright start with a 0-0 away draw against Indian giants East Bengal, the Dhaka Federation Cup champions must have to win their away fixture if they are to keep their hopes alive following a 3-0 thrashing at home to Jordan's Al Faisaly last month.

The Reds, however, will miss key defender Rajani, who was sent off against Al Faisaly in Dhaka.

The squad includes two foreign defenders, Rwandan Harry and Ghansah of Ghana.

MuktiJoddha's football secretary Sheikh Ataur Rahman, one of the three officials of the touring party, informed that they have made a request through the Bangladesh Football Federation to their Turkmenistan counterparts to stage

SEE PAGE 17 COL 7



PHOTO: AFP

Colombian goalkeeper Miguel Calero clearing the ball from the feet of Argentine striker Hernan Crespo at the Monumental stadium in Buenos Aires on March 30.

Argentina stay top



REUTERS, Rio de Janeiro

Ecuador and Paraguay emerged favourites to join Argentina and Brazil as South America's representatives at next year's World Cup after good results in Wednesday's qualifiers.

Third-placed Ecuador drew 2-2 in Peru, helped by an astonishing late miss from Peruvian substitute Andres Mendoza, while Paraguay stayed fourth with a 2-1 win at home to Chile.

Argentina stayed top of the 10-nation group with a hard-fought 1-0 win over a defensive, 10-man Colombia in Buenos Aires and world champions Brazil drew 1-1 in Uruguay with the help of a controversial equaliser from Emerson.

The top four teams in the 10-nation group go straight to Germany and Argentina, leaders with 28 points, and Brazil, second with 24, are all but mathematically qualified.

Ecuador, with 20, are also very handily placed while Paraguay (19) have opened up a three-point gap between themselves and fifth-placed Uruguay.

The other five teams now appear to be fighting for fifth spot which earns a two-leg playoff against the Oceania region winners and the chance of another place.

Only three points separate Uruguay (16) from bottom-placed Bolivia (13). Colombia, Peru, Chile

and Venezuela are sandwiched between, all on 14 points.

Ecuador, who bounced back from two goals down to hammer Paraguay 5-2 last Sunday, showed a similar quality in Lima.

Paolo Guerrero gave Peru a second minute lead but England-based Ulises de la Cruz headed Ecuador level within a minute and 19-year-old Antonio Valencia took advantage of shambolic defending to put Ecuador ahead in first-half injury time.

Dutch-based Jefferson Farfan equalised in the 58th minute and Peru had a golden chance to snatch three points in the 89th minute.

Ukrainian-based Mendoza forced his way past goalkeeper Edwin Villafuerte and found himself two metres in front of an open goal, only to miss his kick altogether as he tried to deftly flick it into the net.

Paraguay, attempting to reach their third successive World Cup, bounced back in Asuncion with goals by Gustavo Moringo and

Jose Cardozo, who took his tally in the competition to seven.

Defender Luis Fuentes pulled one back for Chile

Argentina struggled to break down a well-marshalled Colombia defence, Hernan Crespo finally making the breakthrough in the 65th minute as he swept home Luciano Galletti's low cross.

The visitors had midfielder Fabian Vargas sent off in the 41st minute as he picked up two yellow cards in eight minutes, both for hacking down Javier Saviola.

Instead of making life easier for Argentina, the dismissal merely mad the visitors defend even more doggedly.

Uruguay and Brazil produced a stirring match in Montevideo, Diego Forlan putting the hosts in front in the 49th minute and Emerson levelling in the 68th amid claims of offside.

SEE PAGE 17 COL 8

STANDINGS

South American 2006 World Cup qualifying table after Wednesday's matches (played, won, drawn, lost, goals for, goals against, points):

Argentina	13	8	4	1	24	12	28
Brazil	13	6	6	1	21	11	24
Ecuador	13	6	2	5	19	15	20
Paraguay	13	5	4	4	16	17	19
Uruguay	13	4	4	5	18	25	16
Colombia	13	3	5	5	12	12	14
Peru	13	3	5	5	13	14	14
Chile	13	3	5	5	12	14	14
Venezuela	13	4	2	7	14	20	14
Bolivia	13	4	1	8	15	23	13