

Zia, Reefat start well

SPORTS REPORTER

Grandmasters Ziaur Rahman and Reefat Bin Sattar won in the opening round of the eighth United Insurance and Leasing Grandmasters Chess tournament at the NSConference room yesterday.

Zia beat his Biman teammate FM Mehdi Hasan while Reefat defeated Abdul Maleq. Iran's Grandmaster Ghaem Maghami Ehsan drew with FM Aminul Islam while junior champion Minhazuddin Ahmed also drew with veteran GM Niaz Murshed.

India's IM PDS Girinath beat Chanchal Ghosh as did IM Mahmood Lodi of Pakistan who beat Monir Hossain.

Miandad can still coach Pakistan

PTI, Karachi

Former Pakistan captain and coach Javed Miandad is ready to give a serious thought to coaching the national team again if the cricket board offered him the job.

Miandad, who has coached senior team on three separate terms but was removed acrimoniously on all occasions, said he had always kept national interest above everything else.

"It is a hypothetical question but I can only think about it if the offer comes to me. I have to think about various options if any offer comes through," he said.

Miandad did not apply for the job, for which PCB advertised in newspapers after the World Cup keeping May 15 as the deadline for interested candidates to submit their applications.

The former Test batsman said the Board had deviated the post of Pakistan coach by openly advertising the position.

Miandad, the country's highest run-getter with 8832 in 124 Tests, last worked with the team in 2004. He was asked to step down as coach after his team lost a historical home series to arch rivals India.

He was replaced by Bob Woolmer, who died during the World Cup in mysterious circumstances a day after Pakistan's shock defeat at the hands of Ireland following which they were knocked out of the tournament.

Miandad, who will turn 50 next month, said he had served the country with honour and dignity and it was always his wish that Pakistan team perform well in the international arena.

PCB chief Naseem Ashraf, in a recent statement, had said they (PCB) were looking for a foreign coach, who would be appointed within next few months.

Dav parts with

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"Ashraf's innings brought a touch of breeze into the game. He is more keen to one-day cricket but he is very good player. If he hit the ball in the air he is going to get out caught. He knows that. But obviously it was a good knock," he said.

"The thing I really wish it could be better if more of the individuals evolve into better players. I would have loved Ashraf to develop more in those four years.

His best cricket is clearly still to come. His consistency will improve as he gets older. He has got terrific talent, no doubt," he said.

"I will go back to Australia (laugh). I will go back and recharge the battery. You all know that there may be another challenge not far away. That will remain the decision of the employers. On the 4th of June if they make that decision, that's great. If not, that's fine," he informed, casting an aura of ambiguity over his future.

Juve capture

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The 38-year-old is reportedly seeking an improved deal and assurances that the club will hold on to key players like Trezeguet and goalkeeper Gianluigi Buffon.

Juventus, as the club at the centre of the furore over the match-fixing scandal, were stripped of the Serie A titles they won in 2004-05 and 2005-06 and denied entry into the Champions League.

They were also deducted nine points for their ultimately successful Serie B campaign.



Did U Know?

India captain Rahul Dravid scored 129 runs from 176 balls in the first innings of the second Test against Bangladesh at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur on May 25. It was his twenty-fourth century, second against Bangladesh.

Rain delays inevitable



AFP, Leeds

Rain came to West Indies' aid when the first two sessions of the third day's play in their second Test against England here at Headingley on Sunday were washed out.

Groundstaff, during the lunch break, removed covers off the pitch only for rain to return and prevent a resumption before tea.

West Indies, having been made to follow-on, were facing an innings defeat at 22 for two - still a huge 402 runs shy of making England bat again - and going 1-0 down in the four-match series.

West Indies' task of saving the game was made harder by knowing that captain and top-order batsman Ramnaresh Sarwan would only, according to a team spokesman, "bat in an emergency."

Sarwan didn't bat in the first innings after sustaining a shoulder injury while fielding Friday which threatened his continued tour participation.

Chris Gayle was nine not out after nightwatchman Daren Powell was out to the last ball of Saturday's play. Powell was one of six second day wickets for Ryan Sidebottom.

The 26-year-old Nottinghamshire left-arm seamer, playing in place of the injured Matthew Hoggard, was appearing in just his second Test six years after a wicketless debut against Pakistan at Lord's.

England's dominant position had been created by Kevin Pietersen's Test best 226 in a total of 570 for seven declared.

That innings also saw captain Michael Vaughan, on his Yorkshire home ground, score 103 on his return to Test cricket after 18 months on the sidelines with several injuries.

Pietersen's was the highest Test score by an England player since Graham Gooch's 333 against India at Lord's in 1990.

The 26-year-old South African-born batsman's innings meant only Australia legend Sir Donald Bradman, with 3,194 runs, had scored more in his first 25 Tests than Pietersen's 2,448.

Sidebottom, who began his career at Headingley with Yorkshire before moving three years ago, took four for 42 as West Indies collapsed to 146 all out.

The tourists, without Shivnarine Chanderpaul for this match after the experienced batsman, withdrew because of a right knee injury, then lost two more wickets to Sidebottom, whose father Arnie played one Test for England in 1985 against Australia.

That left Sidebottom with a second innings return so far of two for 12 in five overs and a current match haul of six for 54.

SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at tea on the third day of the second Test between England and West Indies at Headingley on Sunday:

ENGLAND: First innings 570 for 7 decl (Vaughan 103, Pietersen 226,

Prior 75)

WEST INDIES: First innings

Gayle lbw b Sidebottom 11

Ganga lbw b Sidebottom 5

Smith c Cook b Plunkett 26

Joseph c Strauss b Harmison 13

Morton c Prior b Harmison 5

Bravo b Sidebottom 23

Ramdin c Prior b Plunkett 6

Powell c Collingwood b Plunkett 8

Taylor not out 23

Collymore c Strauss b Sidebottom 3

Sarwan absent hurt

Extras: (lb-13, w-4, nb-6) 23

Total: (All out in 37 overs) 146

Fall of wickets: 1-17, 2-23, 3-68, 4-74, 5-82, 6-94, 7-114, 8-124, 9-146.

Bowler O M R W

Sidebottom 12 2 42 4

Harmison 12 0 55 2

Plunkett 12 1 35 3

Panesar 1 0 1 0

WEST INDIES: Second innings

(overnight 22-2)

Gayle not out 9

Ganga lbw b Sidebottom 11

Powell lbw b Sidebottom 0

Extras: (b-1, nb-1) 2

Total: (For 2 wickets in 9 overs) 22

Fall of wickets: 1-20, 2-22.

To bat: R Smith, R Sarwan, S

Joseph, D Morton, D Bravo, D

Ramdin, J Taylor, C Collymore.

Bowler O M R W

Sidebottom 5 2 12 2

Plunkett 2 0 6 0

Harmison 2 0 3 0

Safin sends Vicente packing

AFP, Paris



Heavy rain and biting cold brought havoc to the opening day of the French Open on Sunday with

only former world number one Marat Safin managing to book a place in the second round.

The Russian eased past Spanish qualifier Fernando Vicente 6-1, 6-3, 6-1 as the second Grand Slam tournament of the season got off to a soggy start.

Safin, the 22nd seed here and a semi-finalist in 2002, will face either Janko Tipsarevic or Dusan Vemic for a place in the third round.

The rain, which eventually brought a suspension of play to all courts at 1035GMT, came as a relief for 2002 women's champion Serena Williams.

The American winner of eight Grand Slam titles, seeded eight and playing at Roland Garros for the first time in three years, was 5-6 down to Tsvetana Pironkova when play was halted with the Bulgarian 19-year-old serving for the opening

set.

Twenty-four matches had been scheduled for the opening day of the 2007 championship but with no let-up in the torrential rain, organisers were forced to cancel a third of the planned programme.

Safin, playing in his ninth French Open, looked impressive against the 133-ranked Vicente and wrapped up his centre court win in just 84 minutes hitting 43 winners to the Spaniard's 14.

"They were very tough conditions, it was raining, then it wasn't and it was very windy," said Safin who refuses to write off his chances of winning a French Open title despite the likely domination of the tournament by defending champion Rafael Nadal and world number one Roger Federer.

"This is still my favourite surface. The courts here are great, the bounce is good. It's my place. If I can get through a few rounds I can be dangerous."

The former US and Australian Open winner has endured a mediocre season so far with a best performance of a semi-final run at the Las Vegas event in March where he lost to Lleyton Hewitt.

It was also the last time the

unpredictable Russian managed to win consecutive matches at the same tournament.

On Sunday, the 27-year-old, who had lost to Vicente in St Petersburg in 2003 in their only previous encounter, was never in trouble unleashing his big, double-fisted backhand to devastating effect.

Once he had enjoyed three comfortable breaks in the first set, which was wrapped up in only 25 minutes, Safin was cruising.

In stark contrast, Serena Williams was struggling against Pironkova, the world 91.

The 25-year-old Australian Open champion slipped 2-5 down before the Bulgarian allowed her opponent to claw back to 5-5 having squandered two set points.

Later Sunday, Justin Henin, bidding for a third successive French Open title and a fourth in five years, was scheduled to open her campaign against Russia's Elena Vesnina.

But with the heavy rain expected to continue, and temperatures plummeting, it was looking increasingly likely that Safin's victory would remain the only significant action of the day.

Effort pleases Dravid

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his opposite number Habibul Bashar who won the toss, and as it now seems, and made the mistake of bowling first on a placid wicket.

"Habibul (Bashar) is not the first or last captain to have made a toss call that a captain regrets. We knew that Bangladesh would struggle once we had kept them on the field for 150 overs and scored over 600 runs," said Dravid.

Dravid had some good words for Mashrafe Bin Mortaza who turned on a stellar performance in the series by topping the batting charts with 151 runs, including two half-centuries. The 'Narail Express'

also took six wickets in the first Test.

"He has done well with the bat and with the ball in the first innings. He is a very good player," commented Dravid.

His views were echoed by interim coach Ravi Shastri.

"He is one quality player in this team. He has a lot of cricket ahead of him and I hope he shows his class to the world," said Shastri, who was on a one-off stint with the India team.

"I will respect my contract with ESPN and continue there but I have enjoyed my stay with the India

team. The boys can tell you that," admitted Shastri who turned 45 yesterday.

"It is quite important to have team spirit and I think the boys have shown great unity -- something that is quite important for the dressing-room. They showed their true characters by winning the first one-day under such heat and also in this Test."

The straight-speaking Shastri owned up to his earlier words saying, "I did not want to hurt anyone by my words as I speak like this all the time."

Mohammedan runners-up

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MOHAMMEDAN ABAHANI

Archivals Mohammedan and Abahani relieved their foreign players, Sandeep Sharma of India and Sri Lankan international Upul Chandana respectively, for the prestige match which turned out to be a dour show in the end.

Like the first leg game, where the champs won convincingly after a five-wicket burst by Mashrafe Bin Mortaza who was very busy at the other end of the city in a vain attempt to save the blushes of the national team with his batting prowess against India in a Test match, Abahani looked on course for a double when they recovered from early blows.

Ten for two after three overs, makeshift opener Ziaur Rahman's 60-ball 47 helped Abahani get beyond the 100-run mark losing three wickets while chasing a 166-run target.

But once the pace bowler was dismissed after hitting five fours and a six, Arafat Sunny ripped through the middle-order with a four-wicket haul in 6.5 overs as Abahani lost seven wickets in the space of 37 runs.

The left-arm spinner, who conceded 21 runs after scoring second highest 39 in the Mohammedan innings, was adjudged the man-of-the-match.

Earlier, opener Junaid Siddique's

40 off 38 balls lifted Mohammedan to 165 after they lost wickets at regular interval following the decision to bat first.

DOHS-SONARGAON

At the Dhamondi Cricket Stadium adjacent to the Abahani club tent where he spent 16 years, the illustrious career of Akram not only ended but also saw the baton transferred to the new generation.

Akram's nephew, now the national one-day opener Tamim Iqbal, smashed 60 off 46 balls as DOHS reached 255-5 in reply to Sonargaon's 252-9, built around Marshall Ayub's 88.

Tamim won the man-of-the-match award but Marshall's solace was having the prized scalp of Akram, who gave a catch to Ilias Sunny after being ten minutes at the crease.

BIMAN-VICTORIA

Opener Nafis Iqbal made 50 not out and number three Farhad Reza smashed dozen boundaries including six sixes in an explosive 80 off 54 deliveries as Biman raced to a revised target of 181 losing the wicket of Mosharraf at BKSP after bowling out Victoria for 196.

The match-best honour in the rain-interrupted match, however, went to Biman medium pacer Shariful Haque, who captured 4-35 from ten overs.

SCORES IN BRIEF

MOHAMMEDAN: 165 all out in 39.5 overs (Junaid 40, Aftab 12, Faisal 26, Arafat 39, Rezaul 19, extras 18, Alamgir 3-26, Sadat 1-29, Shahjada 1-10, Kamrul 3-22).

ABAHANI: 140 all out in 39.5 overs (Zia 47, Nazim 25, Naem 32, Kamrul 13, extras 9, Manjurul 2-24, Hasibul 2-241, Arafat 4-21, Rezaul 2-22).

Result: Mohammedan won by 25 runs.

SONARGAON: 252-9 in 50 overs (Al-Shahriar 44, Ilias 29, Kapali 25, Marshall 88, Dhiman 14, Ezaz 17, Salim 16, extras 5, Mahmud 2-50, Nazmul 1-25, Shueb 3-50, Nabil 1-49, Ehsanul 1-42).

OLD DOHS: 255-5 in 48.3 overs (Tamim 60, Shamsur 66, Majhar 46, Ehsanul 45, Shahn 16 n.o., extras 18, Ashiqur 2-52, Masudur 1-26, Marshall 2-42).

Result: DOHS won by five wickets.

VICTORIA: 196 all out in 49.4 (Kayes 13, Faruque 42, Mabud 38, Riyad 20, Nazmul 33 n.o., Shuvro 11, extras 15, Mushfiq 3-44, Murshed 1-28, Shariful 4-35, Mosharraf 2-28).

BIMAN: 181-1 in 37.4 overs (Mosharraf 37, Nafis 50 n.o., Farhad 80 n.o., extras 14, Sabbir 1-22).

Result: Biman won by nine wickets.

Death threats against Dravid, Dhoni?

AFP, New Delhi

Indian police are investigating a letter written by Maoist rebels threatening to kill cricketers Rahul Dravid and Mahendra Dhoni, a newspaper reported Sunday.

In the letter, the left-wing rebels from the eastern state of Jharkhand and neighbouring Chhattisgarh also decided to kill top cricket officials Sharad Pawar, Niranjana Shah and Rajiv Shukla, according to the Hindustan Times.

"All five are promoting cricket -- a sport of the elite class -- and also leading a luxurious life at the expense of the hard-earned money of the common man," the newspaper quoted the letter as saying.

Pawar is president of the Indian cricket board and federal minister for agriculture.

Jharkhand Chief Minister Madhu Koda said the letter was being taken seriously and Dhoni's security would be reviewed if necessary.

"But before providing more security to Dhoni, the government would like its agencies to find out whether the letter is genuine," he said.

Wicketkeeper-batsman Dhoni, who hails from Jharkhand, and skipper Dravid are currently on tour for India's second and final Test against Bangladesh in Dhaka.

The paper said the handwritten letter, suspected to be an internal communication, was found during a raid on a rebel hideout in Dantewada region in Chhattisgarh on Friday.

In March, 55 policemen were killed by Maoists in Chhattisgarh in one of the worst-ever attacks on Indian security forces.

It followed the assassination of high-profile federal member of parliament Sunil Mahto by Maoists in Jharkhand on March 4. He was the first national-level politician to be assassinated by the left-wing rebels.

The Maoist insurgency began in the 1960s in India as an armed peasant movement. The rebels, who say they are fighting for the rights of landless farmers, operate in 15 of India's 29 states.

Ribery coy

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have more information at the end of next week.

"I could stay at Marseille; with the prospect to play the Champions League, it could tempt me."

Bayern have refused to comment on the reports but are set to sell midfielder Owen Hargreaves to Manchester United and have started their rebuilding process with four new signings - Hamit Altintop, Jan Schlaudraff, Jose Ernesto Sosa and Marcell Jansen.

Alonso rules

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seconds after 57 laps with Massa 46 seconds adrift in third place for Ferrari.

It is by now clearly a one-team race, but there seemed little chance of Hamilton passing his partner as the team controlled the gap and ensured that McLaren had plenty to celebrate.

It was the McLaren team's 14th win in Monaco.

Eto'o's Anfield

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"English football has changed a lot for the better over the past few years. I've seen English teams playing matches which have been very exciting."

"I love the way the fans in England get behind their team. I respect their mentality."

"They are so positive in supporting their own team rather than, as happens in Spain, being against the opposition."

"That's the big difference between England and Spain."

Set for a photo

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Lionel Messi and Samuel Eto'o set up a close-range finish.

But home fans were waving white handkerchiefs in disgust after Ronaldinho sent off for first time this season.

The Brazilian wizard tangled with David Belenguer, going to ground before aiming a kick at his opponent.

Although he barely appeared to make contact, referee Perez Burrull showed him the red card.

As coach Frank Rijkaard shepherded his furiously gesticulating superstar down the tunnel Eto'o was booked in the ensuing melee.

Barca then endured a few nervy moments to hold on for the points.

Former Old Trafford misfit Diego Forlan meanwhile scored twice and ex-Newcastle man Jon Dahl Tomasson bagged the other as Villarreal won in Valencia as the "yellow submarine" torpedoed their rivals' five-match winning stretch in taking their own streak to six.

David Villa and Emiliano Moretti were on target for Valencia, who stay fourth two points behind third-placed UEFA Cup champions Sevilla, who play Real Zaragoza on Sunday with five points to make up on the leading pair.

Percy Sonn no more



AFP, Dubai

International Cricket Council (ICC) president Percy Sonn has died aged 57 the governing body announced in a statement from its Dubai headquarters on Sunday.

Sonn had spent several days in a Cape Town hospital following complications after undergoing a minor colon operation.

He was the first African to head up the ICC but his death leaves the organisation without an obvious successor after England's David Morgan and India's Sharad Pawar tied in a recent vote to replace him.

ICC chief executive Malcolm Speed said: "Percy's mantra was that the game should be inclusive not exclusive; he relished modern cricket's diversity."

Sonn's predecessor as ICC President, Ehsan Mani said: "As a cricket administrator and a man, Percy Sonn was a giant."

"In all the circles in which he moved, he commanded a huge amount of respect and that was never more obvious than when he was in an ICC Board meeting."

"Percy never spoke for the sake of it but when he did speak people listened. He was one of the most intelligent men I have ever met and cricket will be much the poorer for his passing," the Pakistani added.

"It is a tragedy that he was only able to fill the role of ICC President for one year."

Cricket South Africa (CSA)

President Ray Mali said: "This is a terrible shock and a devastating piece of news as I have lost a close personal friend."

"I know Percy was so proud to represent South Africa and the whole continent of Africa as the ICC's first President from this part of the world and he filled the role with great dignity and strength."

Australia's World Cup-winning captain Ricky Ponting added: "I am



PERCY SONN

shocked and saddened to hear his news and first and foremost my thoughts are with Percy's family and friends.

"I will always associate Percy with one of the happiest moments of my career as he was the man who handed over the Cricket World Cup trophy to the Australia team at the end of the tournament in Barbados last month."

"He and his wife then flew with us back from Barbados to London

where we went our separate ways and to think he is no longer with us less than a month later is a huge shock."

"I have been told of his lifetime of service to the game in what, for many years, must have been difficult circumstances in South Africa. Cricket obviously owes him a huge debt of thanks."