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Rain clouds bid the national footballers bye at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday during their final practice match against Sporting Independent before they leave for Sri Lanka to play the SAFF Football Championship.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

## Not too convincing

### Football

#### SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will heavily miss the absence of a genuine playmaker in the side when they compete in the SAFF Football Championship early next month.

It was evident in their last practice match at home yesterday -- in fact the national players' first and only show in the capital before the departure to Thailand on Tuesday en route to Sri Lanka.

Bangladesh are expected to play at least one preparation match in Bangkok.

Although Abu Yusuf's men defeated Sporting Independent -- a local team full of experience but lesser in fitness and stamina -- 1-0 at the Bangabandhu National Stadium on a rainy day, they never convinced the small crowd that they would leave as favourites to regain the title won by their predecessors back in 2003 at home.

Zahid Hassan Emily's tenth minute strike settled the issue for the SAFF preliminary squad -- which will be trimmed to 20 members today -- but the opposition, who enjoyed superior ball possession in the second half, created better chances.

Emily latched on to a left-side centre by overlapping fullback Wally Faisal and headed the ball into the top left corner of Nizam at the Sporting goal after the rival defence allowed the cross to take a

bounce inside the area.

Apart from that early sluggishness, the Sporting backline was excellently marshalled by Sujon, who was ignored for the regional competition for missing an entire season through injury.

The ace Abahani centre-back, who scored Bangladesh's winning goal in the tiebreakers in the 2003 SAFF final against Maldives at the same venue, looked fit and proved that had he been given special attention at the start of the national camp, he could have regained confidence to return to the international scene.

The midfield managed to hold the ball in the first 45 minutes but there was no defence splitting pass for the strikers, who had to rely on crosses from the flanks that seldom came. It has now been established that neither of the current crop would be able to fill in the shoes of Arman Miah, the last midfield genius in the country.

After Arup, a surprise choice in the right midfield, cut a dangerous low cross four minutes after resumption, an alert Sujon fended off the attack and Hassan Al Mamun's first-time volley on the rebound was parried by Nizam.

With Alfaz, Kanchan and Titu -- all part of Bangladesh's winning side in 2003 and the runners-up team two years later in Pakistan -- doing the hardwork, Wajed Gazi's Sporting got the better of the men donning the Nokia kit.

But Kanchan should have done better than delaying a shot after he

got behind Saikat and Rajani with an accurate pass from Rony.

Alfaz then forced a fine save by Biplab, who took the gloves from Aminul who hurt his shoulder during warm-up, from a freekick and Titu's angled drive hit the post much to the relieve of the national camp.

Faisal came close to equalise five minutes from time as he sped past the sloppy national defence and also Biplab but he ran too wide to get the space for shooting.

The national team had their brilliant moments, too. Emily sent a through for substitute Komol who shot wide while Zahed Parvez set Sharif with a gem but the midfielder's effort was wild.

If the passes from the attacking midfielders do not dry up, Bangladesh will rue for poor finishing.

Sporting coach Gazi warned after the match that the national team must recover the 'leakage' quickly. "We have created and missed a few chances. But the opponents in the SAFF won't do that," said the veteran.

Yusuf, on the other hand, looked pleased.

"I thank the opposition for giving us a fighting match. We had a satisfactory first half but the opponents destroyed our plan later," said the former national defender.

"They were a bit rough and I told my boys not to take risks on a slippery pitch."

He admitted that the midfield

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## WOMEN'S HANDBALL India crush Bangladesh

### SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's handball team lost their first match against India by 7-28 in the 3rd South Asian Women's Handball Championship in Lucknow yesterday.

The hosts, who outclassed Nepal in the opening game 33-4 on Friday, dominated the first half 17-2.

In the day's other match, Pakistan defeated Nepal 29-7 after leading the first half 17-1.



**Did U Know?**

American boxer Lamar Clark holds the record for the most consecutive knockouts with 44 in a row between 1958 and 1960.



### Asafa Powell

(Jamaican star sprinter)  
"Everybody knows who he is and what he's done. He's a great player." On Andrew Symonds.



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England v New Zealand  
Second Test, Day Three  
Live from 4:00pm  
**TEN Sports**  
West Indies v Australia  
First Test, Day Four  
Live from 9:00pm

## Delhi keep hopes alive

### CRICINFO, undated

Dinesh Karthik and the Delhi Daredevils' misfiring middle order came good when it mattered to clinch a thrilling five-wicket victory and keep their semifinals hopes alive.

Coming in with the team wobbling at 89 for 4, Karthik blitzed a classy 32-ball 56 to take Delhi past the Mumbai Indians' 176-8 with one ball to spare.

After a breezy start, Delhi looked to lose their way before Karthik, pairing with Manoj Tiwari (36) and Farveez Maharoof who hit the winning runs in a 13-ball 20, took the home side to 179-5 at the Feroz Shah Kotla.

Mumbai, three points behind Delhi and two adrift of Chennai Super Kings, have two games in hand -- against the lowly Deccan Chargers and table-topping Rajasthan Royals -- and may need to win both to make it to the final four.

Earlier, Sanath Jayasuriya's assault gave the Mumbai Indians an explosive start but his team-

mates failed to build on it as Delhi Daredevils fought back. Yo Mahesh epitomised Delhi's combative spirit, recovering from a mauling in his first over to finish with four wickets.

Delhi looked to their spearhead Glenn McGrath for the breakthrough but Jayasuriya and Sachin Tendulkar negotiated him with ease and set about dismantling the others.

Mahesh was brought into the attack but two towering sixes and an edge past the wicketkeeper for four kept the run-rate galloping. Dinesh Karthik, standing up to Farveez Maharoof, then missed a leg-side stumping with Tendulkar overbalancing. The next ball was disdainfully swatted for six by Jayasuriya and the score read 70 for no loss after seven.

The breakthrough came when Tendulkar inside-edged Mahesh onto his stumps and, with Maharoof sending down a clever mix of slower balls and yorkers, the brakes were applied.

Amit Mishra picked up the big wicket of Jayasuriya, who perished attempting his sixth six and it required Robin Uthappa's stunning 23-ball 46 to lift them to a competitive score.

Earlier, a high-scoring thriller,

which produced 412 runs including 39 fours and 18 sixes, finally went the way of Rajasthan Royals who edged Chennai Super Kings by ten runs for their tenth win of the IPL and further consolidated their position at the top of the table.

After Graeme Smith had powered Rajasthan to 211, Chennai put up a spirited run-chase, thanks largely to Albie Morkel's 40-ball 71. In the end, though, his effort was not enough, which means Chennai still have work to do to make it to the last four.

With their team already in the semifinals, Warne experimented with team strategy by making four changes. After he choose to bat, Smith's 51-ball 91 and his stunning 127-run opening-wicket stand with Swapnil Asnodkar put Rajasthan firmly in control at the halfway stage at the MA Chidambaram Stadium.

The first six overs produced nine fours and two sixes, and with the total reading 67, Rajasthan were on their way. Muttiah Muralitharan was brought into the attack in the seventh, but he couldn't stop the bleeding either, as Smith lofted him over wide mid-on, and then slog-swept

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## DHAKA TRI-SERIES BCB announces ticket prices

### SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) yesterday announced the ticket rates for the upcoming tri-series involving Bangladesh, India and Pakistan.

Nominated branches of AB Bank, who bought the ticket selling right for international matches at home during the period of May 2007 to May 2009, in Dhaka will begin selling from June 5. The names of the branches will be mentioned in national daily newspapers.

Bangladesh face Pakistan in the opener at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium on June 8, Pakistan take on arch-rivals India on June 10. On June 12, Bangladesh are up against India while the final is slated for June 14.

The daily ticket rates for the India-Pakistan-Bangladesh Tri-Nation ODI Series 2008 are as follows.

### TICKET DETAILS

	1ST ROUND	FINAL
VIP Grand Stand	Tk 1000	Tk 1500
Club House	Tk 500	Tk 550
Special Enclosure	Tk 400	Tk 450
Gallery	Tk 100	Tk 150

## Tigers to stay in Mirpur

### SPORTS REPORTER

The Tigers practice will resume on Wednesday for next month's tri-series involving India and Pakistan.

The camp will take place at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur instead of Bogra as the team management preferred to have it in Dhaka.

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) earlier felt the necessity of the camp in Bogra to take the advantage of the floodlights, as the triangular tournament will be played in those conditions at Mirpur.

BCB's media committee chairman Ahmed Sajjadul Alam said that they changed their mind as they are hopeful about shifting the lights from Rajshahi to Mirpur by May 28.

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## Sumon takes N'ganj thru'

### SPORTS REPORTER

A fantastic century from Sumon propelled Narayanangiri to the semifinals after a clinical 53-run win over Nilphamari in the 28th National Cricket Championship in Sylhet yesterday.

The right-hander struck six sixes and as many boundaries during his unbeaten 107 off 118 which placed Narayanangiri at 208-9 in 50 overs after they won the toss and batted first. Humayun chipped in with 27 while Masum made 15 as they thwarted a five-wicket haul from Zaidi, who took 5-43 from 10 overs.

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## Taylor slams 154

### Cricket

#### CRICINFO, undated

New Zealand dominated the second day's play at Old Trafford with Ross Taylor's magnificent 154 providing the backbone behind a solid first innings of 381. Taylor was given excellent lower-order assistance from Kyle Mills, whose Test-best 57 ensured New Zealand seized momentum in an enthralling seventh-wicket stand of 89. For England, the wheels hadn't so much fallen off as rolled into a neighbouring village.

Village is roughly the standard score of England's fielders reached, too, during a careless, panicky afternoon session. Shies missed the stumps; overthrows weren't backed up and even Michael Vaughan, the calmest of captains, flustered with his field-settings. None of this degrades the sheer class of Taylor's hundred - his second in Tests and the highest by a New Zealander at Old Trafford.

Some of England's tactics were, at best, confusing. Monty Panesar - who turned it square yesterday - was delayed from entering the attack, as was James Anderson who Jacob Oram struggled against yesterday afternoon. In fact Anderson didn't bowl until 30 minutes before lunch, and it wasn't due to outstanding bowling from Ryan Sidebottom or Stuart Broad. With a strong wind blowing across the ground, Taylor was immediately into his stride with a short-arm bunt through extra cover followed by an audacious cover drive right out of the textbook.

Oram continued to struggle, however, never resembling a batsman fresh from a Lord's hundred last week. Broad persisted in peppering him with bouncers from around the wicket and Oram responded by swaying, ducking

and weaving out of the way, but never was he comfortable. Once Panesar was belatedly introduced, Oram took him on with a skip down the pitch but Panesar beat him in the flight, the ball circling above Anderson at mid-on. He flunked a

relatively easy chance, labouring after the ball and failing to even get a hand on it.

But, remarkably, Oram gifted his wicket four runs later when, on 38, he too laboured when Taylor called

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PHOTO: INTERNET

New Zealand starlet Ross Taylor is overjoyed after he reaches a hundred on the second day of the second Test against England at Old Trafford in Manchester on Saturday.

## Usha, Abahani clash today

### Hockey

#### SPORTS REPORTER

The first leg of the Green Delta Premier Hockey League concludes today with a mouth-watering top-of-the-table clash between defending joint champions Abahani and Usha Krira Chakra.

Usha, who have won all their eight matches so far, need a draw to stay atop but for Abahani, also unbeaten but two points behind following a draw against archrivals Mohammedan, must win in the crucial match ahead of the super league.

The match will kick off at the Maulana Bhasani National Hockey Stadium at 4pm.

Usha's Pakistani coach Rana Jahir said on the eve of the game that if his boys maintain the team spirit that they have displayed throughout the league, they would

finish on top.

Usha, who have 24 points, have three Pakistani players -- Akhter Ali, Tarek Aziz and Sajjad Anwar -- who could change the complexion of the game.

Abahani coach Mahub Harun thought it was the most important match for the sky-blues.

"We want to do something tomorrow in our last match to boost the morale ahead of the super league," said the former national captain, who would rely more on his local collection than Pakistani duo Imran Khan Mohammed Mudassar.

Although it was billed as Rafiqul Islam's former national striker has decided to put back his retirement plans from domestic hockey considering his side's championship chances.

Meanwhile, Ajax Sporting Club confirmed a berth in the 5-team super league after Usha, Abahani,

Mohammedan and Sonali Bank with a 3-0 victory against Wari Club in their last round match yesterday.

Rupam, Jewel and Tutul scored for Ajax, who collected 13 points from nine games to dash the hopes of Azad Sporting Club, who have nine points with a match in hand.

Wari, who returned to the Premiership this season, stuck to the bottom of the table with one point after their eighth defeat.

Local giants Mohammedan, who hardly have any title hopes, finished their campaign at third place with a massive 8-1 defeat of second-from-bottom Bangladesh Sporting Club, who bagged two points.

Syed Al Masum struck twice, Jahid Bin Talib and Kamruzzaman Rana a brace each and skipper Ariful Haque Prince added the other for Mohammedan who reached 23 points.

For Bangladesh SC, Khaja Tayeb Reza reduced the arrears.