

Rain shortens Day Two

SPORTS REPORTER

Rain played havoc on the second day of Bangladesh A's four-day match against Maharashtra Cricket Association at the Shaheed Chandu Stadium in Bogra yesterday.

Only 22.1 overs of play was possible although Day Two began on time, but a mid-day shower storm dented hopes of a full day's play.

During the little play that was possible, the second-string side added just seven runs to their overnight total to be bowled out for 343 from 91 overs. In their reply, MCA made 69 for two.

When the visitors came out with the willow, Bangladesh A pacer Sajidul Islam removed opener Harshad Khadiwale for eight in the third over.

Rohan Bhosale, the other opener, added 52 for the second wicket with Amey Sirikhande. Talha Jubair stopped the threatening partnership when the tall pacer had Sirikhande caught behind for 23 in the 19th over. Bhosale remained unbeaten on 23 along with Kedar Jadhav.

Earlier, Samad Fakhri added to his five-for, taking

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Gisela Dulko of Argentina plays forehand against Slovakia's Dominika Cibulkova in the French Open third round match at Roland Garros in Paris yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Ana, Dinara roll on Heartbreak for Venus

AFP, Paris



Defending champion Ana Ivanovic and top seed Dinara Safina moved a step closer to a quarterfinal showdown at the French Open on Friday as both brushed aside third round opponents.

The Serb trumped Iveta Benesova of the Czech Republic 6-0, 6-2 while the Russian blasted her way past compatriot Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova with a near identical score of 6-2, 6-0.

In three matches played, Safina has dropped just four games and Ivanovic 14.

One more win and they will meet in the quarterfinals setting up a repeat of last year's final won by Ivanovic 6-4, 6-3 for her first Grand Slam title.

There was heartache, however, for another of the tournament favourites as Venus Williams lost 6-0, 6-4 to Agnes Szavay of Hungary to continue her run of flops at Roland Garros.

Ivanovic, wearing strapping on her troublesome right knee but showing no signs that the injury was hampering her, had too much power and all-round skill for Benesova as she set up a fourth round encounter with either ninth seed Victoria Azarenka of Belarus or Carla Suarez Navarro of Spain.

The 21-year-old Belgrade beauty, who reached the world No.1 spot after her win here last year but who has struggled for form and fitness since then, said she had played one of her best matches of the year.

"I feel fit and ready to handle any kind of opponent," she said.

"My game is coming back and I feel more comfortable. I really missed competition last month."

"These kind of matches help for the tough matches ahead in the second week."

The 23-year-old Safina once again blasted out of the blocks peppering her younger opponent with her powerful groundstrokes down both sides of the court.

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Don't forget the Tigers

AFP, London



Given Bangladesh's track record, few rivals will lose sleep over Mohammad Ashraful's men during the World Twenty20 tournament.

The Tigers have lost their last six T20 internationals, 13 of their last 14 Tests and 13 of their last 15 one-day matches, a record that will make even their most ardent supporters squirm.

But write-off Bangladesh at your own peril, as title hopefuls India famously discovered at the 50-overs-a-side World Cup in 2007 when they were knocked out in the first round.

Later the same year, the West Indies suffered the same fate when they lost to Bangladesh in the inaugural T20 Worlds in South Africa and failed to make the second round.

Those two wins in an otherwise dismal international record propelled Bangladesh to centre-stage and sparked a joyous frenzy in the cricket-crazy South Asian nation.

But success continues to elude Bangladesh and it will need a remarkable turn in fortunes

for Ashraful's men to excel in the showpiece event of cricket's shortest format.

Bangladesh need to beat either defending champions India or Ireland in the preliminary round to make the Super Eights stage for the second successive time.

"We have a good team suited for Twenty20 cricket, so I am confident we can deliver if we play to our potential," Ashraful said. "We are not scared of taking on the best."

Bangladesh's chief selector Rafiqul Alam said his team's initial target was to repeat the 2007 feat and qualify for the Super Eights.

"I have a lot of confidence in this team which is a nice blend of youth and experience," he said. "The best thing is that the boys have played together for a long time at different levels and know their strengths."

"I am very hopeful that Bangladesh will play some quality cricket in England."

Desperate to see favourable results, Alam and his co-selectors have not hesitated to gamble with raw, young talent for the T20 Worlds.

Among the new faces are two hard-hitting batsmen in Shamsur Rahman, 20, and reserve

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Ponting fires a shot

AFP, Nottingham

Australia captain Ricky Ponting has warned England that playing Andrew Flintoff in the forthcoming Ashes series could be fatal if the all-rounder is not fully fit.

Ponting and his teammates flew into England this week ahead of the ICC World Twenty20 tournament which precedes the Ashes and the combative batsman wasted little time turning up the heat on the old enemy.

While Ponting claims he feels refreshed and ready for battle after four weeks away from the game, England are fretting over the fitness of Flintoff, who has been ruled out of next month's Twenty20 event as he continues to recover from knee surgery on an injury suffered during his stint in the Indian Premier League.

Flintoff was a key figure when England regained the Ashes in 2005 and, although he has rarely reached those heights, he remains a

talismanic figure for Andrew Strauss's team. Ponting, whose side won back the Ashes in 2007, believes that dependency on Flintoff could force England to throw him in when the latest series starts in July even if he isn't completely ready.

"That's going to be the great decision the England selectors are going to have to make come the First Test," Ponting said at Trent Bridge on Friday.

"Flintoff is obviously very important to their make-up and set-up. Maybe, as we saw in 2007, if he's not 100 percent fit then maybe that sort of impact he can have around the team is not there."

"2005 to 2007 we saw two completely different players and that had a lot to do with the level of fitness that he had under his belt going into each series."

"That's where they're going to have a tough decision to make."

"I don't know where Pieterse's at the moment, I'm not sure how bad his problem is, but they could face something similar there as well."

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A walk in the park

TIGERCRIKET.COM, Oxfordshire



The main feature of Bangladesh's second practice was some inspired batting and the Tigers really made it a joy-filled afternoon's cricket for the few hundred that came to the St. Lawrence Ground.

Crossing 200 is a remarkable feat in a T20 match no matter who the opponents are but Bangladesh made it look easy after only 3 runs had come from the first two overs. In the 206 for 6 the Tiger made there were 18 fours and 10 sixes and the Netherlands to their credit didn't fare too bad either and had 14 boundaries and 5 sixes in their innings of 142.

Back to the match and Mohammad Ashraful's 40-ball onslaught that brought 69 runs (11x4) was complimented by the blitz from Mahmud Ullah (56 off 37; 3x4, 4x6) and then Rokibul Hassan (27 not out off 12; 1x4, 3x6) and Mushfiqur Rahim (24 off 8; 3x6). Ashraful cut the ball fiercely and only took the aerial route when the field was in. All the batsmen preferred the shorter boundary on the side of the spectators' stand and the flatness of the wicket ensured a spectacle for the fans.

"It was a fine effort. We just kept on going till the end and in this form of the game you need to do that. Netherlands may not be the strongest opposition but you still have to clear the boundary and pick the gaps. Almost everyone had a good hit out there and that would give confidence to the boys," said captain Ashraful who also lauded the spirit in the side.

"We had to travel a total of nearly five hours both ways for the match but the boys never let that bother them and look fit and eager. There is a lot of talking in the field and good movement," said Ashraful.

Mahmud Ullah has been a revelation on the tour so far and followed up his 43 in the first match with another good innings here.

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Rubel strikes two blows

SPORTS REPORTER

Pacer Rubel Hossain picked up two wickets as Scotland were struggling against Bangladesh in the third practice match at the Wormsley cricket ground yesterday.

Scotland were perilously placed at 38-3 in 7 overs when the last report was received here.

Pace spearhead Mashrafe Bin Mortaza took the other wicket.

Nayeem Islam, Abdur Razzak, Zunaed Siddiqui and Shahadat Hossain have been given rest for the final additional practice match.

Today is a rest day and on Sunday the Tigers move into their World Twenty20s base in Nottingham.

Rajshahi clinch U-16 title

SPORTS REPORTER

Rajshahi North banked on Ahmedul Kabir and Jubairul Islam to thrash Dhaka North by 121 runs in the final of the Standard Chartered Young Tigers Under-16 cricket tournament at the Rajshahi Divisional Stadium yesterday.

Batting first, the hosts made 206-8 from 50 overs with skipper Kabir hitting 83 off 123 balls before Dhaka were bundled out for 85 runs from 27.4 overs. Jubair took five for 10 in his eight-over spell.

For Dhaka, only Jubair Hossain made an impact,

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Sabuj Sena win big

SPORTS REPORTER



Sabuj Sena Club of Faridpur picked up Football Player's Welfare Association 7-0 in the Bashundhara Champions Club Cup at the Gopalganj Stadium yesterday.

Nuromol scored an amazing five goals in the 4th, 7th, 16th, 33rd and 72nd minute while Shahadat and Palon increased the margin in the 41st and 89th minute respectively.

Up north in Sherpur, Young Men's Club of Fakirpur drubbed locals Ghagra Sporting Club 3-0, with Shanto (34th and 79th) and

Babu (41st) sharing the team's success. To make things worse for Ghagra, Sohail was sent off in the 70th minute.

Purbani Tarun Sangha triumphed by a similar margin of 3-0 at the Feni Stadium against Laxmipur's Chowrasta Club. Roni, Jewel and Shyamol were the scorers for the winning team.

Brothers Union Club (Pabna) beat Shinga Upazilla (Natore) 2-0 while at the Rajshahi Stadium while in Tangail, Bipsnob Sangha (Gazipur) bettered Shonali Atit Club (Manikganj) 2-1. Two goals were scored in the space of ten minutes for the winners

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Javed weaves magic over Shingra

SPORTS REPORTER

Javed of Laxmi Narayan Cotton Mills scored a double hat-trick to send Shingra Dum Dum Pilot School and College tumbling to a 8-0 loss in the Citycell National School Football Championship at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The young striker weaved his magic in the 15th, 22nd, 35th, 48th, 68th and 80th minutes while Anik and Indrajeet contributed further in the 70th and 76th minutes respectively.

Also at the Big Bowl, Town Secondary School beat RSKH Institution Mohammadabad 4-2 and Victoria High School

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Fatigue India's worry

AFP, London



Tired limbs, jaded minds and a tricky draw have toughened

India's path as Mahendra Singh Dhoni's men defend their World Twenty20 title in England next month.

The June 5-21 tournament is the latest event for Team India in a non-stop roadshow that began with a full tour of New Zealand in February-April before a five-week sojourn in South Africa for the Indian Premier League.

Dhoni's team returned home for just three days after the IPL before setting off again for England to defend the title they won in the inaugural Twenty20 World Cup in South Africa in 2007.

Coach Gary Kirsten admitted the heavy workload was a cause for worry, but the former South African opener was confident his wards will rise to the challenge in England.

"The Indian players have been on the road for a long time and the biggest challenge will be mental fatigue," Kirsten said recently.

"But they have enormous

pride when representing India and have become a tight unit over the past few months. I am sure they will look forward to reuniting and playing for their country."

The gruelling schedule has already seen aggressive opener Virender Sehwag miss some IPL matches due to a finger injury, while pace spearhead Zaheer Khan is recovering from a sore shoulder.

Skipper Dhoni has been nursing a back strain as a result of being one of the world's busiest cricketers, who keeps wicket, bats and leads his team in all forms of the game.

"I am not worried at all," said Dhoni. "One gets used to the modern day schedule and I am sure we will all be raring to go once the tournament starts."

The road to the semi-finals is no joy ride for the defending champions even though they are drawn with lowly Bangladesh and Ireland in the preliminary round.

Three of the toughest rivals in the 12-nation tournament - Australia, South Africa and hosts England - await them in the Super Eights round where the real battle for semi-final places begins.

India had beaten all three in the space of four magical nights in Durban in 2007 to advance to the final against Pakistan, but few are willing to take an encore for granted.

"You can't afford to look too far ahead, there is the first round against Bangladesh and Ireland to get through," said the Indian captain. "We all know what can happen."

During the 50-overs-a-side World Cup in the Caribbean in 2007, India were sensationally knocked out by Bangladesh in the preliminary stage, while

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PHOTO: AFP

India skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni (L) and Harbhajan Singh arrive for an official team photo shoot yesterday in Mumbai prior to leave for England to play the Twenty20 World Championship scheduled from June 5-21.



Did U Know?

Boris Yeltsin, the former president of the Russian Federation, was a volleyball player. Russia hosted the Boris Yeltsin Cup in 2008.



Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero

(Spanish Prime Minister) "Spanish football is very strong. We've won the European Cup, today the Champions League and now we will win the World Cup." After Barcelona's 2-0 win over defending champions Manchester United in the UEFA Champions League final on Wednesday.



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French Open
Live from 3:00pm
ESPN
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Sports News
Live at 8:30pm

Zia maintains 2nd position

SPORTS REPORTER

Grand Master Ziaur Rahman preserved his second position with Indian GM Sandipan Chanda, after his win over Xu Deshun of China in the 2nd Subic Open International Chess Tournament in seven rounds yesterday at Olongapo City.

The second-place holders have 5.5 points each.

GM Niaz Murshed have earned four points from seven matches losing to GM Abhijit Gupta (India). GM Ghaem Ehsan Magami is the solo leader in the points table with six in his kitty.