



Bangladesh striker Mamunur Rahman (R) celebrates after scoring one of his two goals in their opening match of the 11th SA Games against Sri Lanka at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

And first gold goes to India

QUAZI AMANULLAH From Khulna



India grabbed the first gold of the 11th South Asian (SA) Games when their women's team won the 30-kilometre road race time trial here in Khulna on Saturday.

The Indian team comprising Chanbang Drameshw, Kansom Gevi Shuchitra, Mahita Mohammed and Reejani finished the race with a fantastic timing of 44 minutes and 22.15 seconds. Their success also ended Sri Lanka's dominance in the event. The Lankan ladies, who won the gold in Colombo 2006, clinched the bronze.

The Pakistan team consisting of Aysha Amin, Misbah Mushta Ali, Rahila Banu and Sidra Sadaf took the silver clocking 47 minutes and 04.06 seconds in a closely fought race with the Lankans, who finished with 47 minutes and 07.08 seconds.

It was a far better performance by the Indians from the last Games in Colombo and an elated Chabunghm Drameshw said that their success was a result of long and grueling training.

"We were trained by an Australian coach for one year before coming here. And we are extremely happy with the result," said Drameshw.

As soon as the race started from Zero Point of Khulna, the Indian cyclists took control and were never threatened by their opponents on their way back to the starting point via Shiromoni.

Hosts Bangladesh had not hoped anything from this event. However, the home girls did not fare badly despite finishing last among the four teams. The quartet of Marma Fatema Chingby, Shila Farhana Sultana, Biswas Sathi and Sathi Monoara Khanom finished the race with a timing of 48 minutes 41.31 seconds.

Earlier, Vice-Chancellor of Khulna University Professor Dr. Md. Saifuddin Shah inaugurated the cycling event in a colourful ceremony.

The men's 80-kilometre race will be held today.

MEDALS TABLE			
Country	G	S	B
India	1	0	0
Pakistan	0	1	0
Sri Lanka	0	0	1

Tigers reach New Zealand

SPORTS REPORTER

The Tigers landed in New Zealand in the early hours of Saturday to play one Twenty20 and three one-day internationals and a Test against the Black Caps.

Coach Jamie Siddons joined the squad in Hamilton from Australia while pacer Shahadat Hossain, all-rounder Mahmudullah Riyad and middle-order batsman Aftab Ahmed, who left Dhaka Friday night, are due to reach Hamilton today.

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza has yet to recover from the viral fever and it's still uncertain whether he will be able to reach New Zealand in time for the T20 match which will be played at the Seddon Park on February 3.

"Doctor has advised me to take three to four days of rest," said Mashrafe, who may join the team before the first one-dayer which will take place on February 5 if he recovers fully from his sickness.

Mashrafe has been out of international cricket since July last year after he had injured his knees during the first Test in West Indies and was only selected for the T20 and three one-day matches in New Zealand.

The Tigers will have a practice session at Seddon Park today and will officially start the tour with the T20 match. The three one-day matches are scheduled for February 5, February 8 and February 11.

The only Test match will be held in Hamilton from February 15 to February 19.



BTU	
SOUTH ASIAN GAMES WOMEN'S FOOTBALL	
India v Pakistan	Live from 2:30pm
Bangladesh v Sri Lanka	Live from 5:00pm
STAR Cricket	
Australia v Pakistan	Fifth ODI
Live from 10:30am	
STAR Sports	
Australian Open Men's Singles Final	Live from 11:30am
ESPN	
English Premiership Man City v Portsmouth	Live from 7:25pm
Arsenal v Man United	Live from 9:55pm

Hosts' winning start

SPORTS REPORTER



A brace from Mamunur Rahman gave Bangladesh a winning start in the hockey competition of the 11th South Asian (SA) Games when they handed a 3-1 defeat to Sri Lanka at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Kamruzzaman netted the other for the hosts while Mulaffer struck the consolation goal for the Lankans, who handed a 1-0 defeat to Bangladesh in the Colombo SA Games in 2006 to win the bronze medal.

The scoreline may give an impression of an easy win for the hosts, but it wasn't so. The team which has been prepared for over a year under the supervision of German coach Gerhard Peter Rach, appeared very nervous from the beginning, giving plenty of miss passes while playing in a defensive mode.

"It was our first match for some time and we all were a bit nervous but we recovered well in the second half and won the game convinc-

ingly," said captain Moshir Rahman after the match.

Coach Gerhard, however, appeared satisfied with the performance, though he declined to say anything when he was asked about his players' nervousness.

Bangladesh showed signs of a planned game in the first half and took 32 minutes to take the lead, but that did not come before facing some scares from the Sri Lankans, who put up a spirited show throughout the game.

Snatching penalty corners and converting them is regarded as the strength of Bangladesh, but during this game it seemed they had forgotten it and instead gone for field goal.

Bangladesh, though, went in front with a goal from penalty-corner, converted by Mamun after Rasel Mahmud and Kamruzzaman combined to create the opportunity three minutes from the break.

The joy of the hosts lasted only two minutes as Sri Lanka drew level through Mulaffer ran down from the middle to

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KKR not coming

SPORTS REPORTER

Indian Premier League (IPL) franchisee Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) will not visit Bangladesh in the first week of February as it was earlier announced.

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), after a board meeting on December 22, told that the IPL side would play three exhibition T20 matches against a BCB selection between February 1 to 5.

"Right at this moment, it is not possible for us to arrange the matches as there are a number of events including the SA Games," said BCB's acting CEO Nizamuddin Ahmed Chowdhury yesterday.

This announcement from the BCB comes as a surprise since they should have been well informed about all the schedules of upcoming events when they announced the trip.

Cricket begins in Rajshahi today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

The cricket competition of the 11th South Asian Games kicks off today with hosts Bangladesh taking on Nepal at the Shahid Kamruzzaman Stadium in Rajshahi.

The match will start at 1pm. Cricket has been introduced for the first time in the region's biggest sporting extravaganza.

Bangladesh announced a 14-member squad for the T20 game comprising academy and under-19 players. Wicketkeeper-batsman Mohammad Mithun will lead the Bangladesh Under-21 side in the competition.

Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal and Maldives are the other

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BKSP clinch Dhaka Metro schools title

SPORTS REPORTER

BKSP clinched the Dhaka Metro title of the Standard Chartered Young Tigers Under-16 School Cricket Tournament with a 54-run victory over Willes Little Flower School in a low-scoring final at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium yesterday.

After a top order hiccup, Kamran Amin and Salehin Rifat shared 54 runs in the seventh wicket stand as BKSP scored 189 before being all out in 48.1 overs after deciding to bat first.

Kamran hit team's highest 46 off 102 balls with four boundaries while man-of-the-match Rifat contributed with

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Bangladeshi shuttler Saif Uddin smashes during his game against Maldives' Hassan Afsheen Shaheem in the men's badminton of the 11th South Asian Games at the Wooden Floor Gymnasium yesterday.

Embarrassing!

SPORTS REPORTER

Organisers were once again embarrassed when the start of badminton was delayed by 45 minutes due to electricity cut-off at the newly-built Wooden-Floor Gymnasium on the second day of the 11th South Asian Games yesterday.

The opening ceremony of the discipline was scheduled to begin at 9:00am but it got underway at 9:45 after power supply was restored.

Abdur Rahman, director of planning and development of National Sports Council however claimed that it was a small issue and it wasn't something to take note of. Bangladesh Badminton Federation president Rubaba Dowla inaugurated the event after a brief opening ceremony.

Earlier on the opening day, seven Nepali athletes and officials were injured when their hotel lift crashed down due to overload. Two foreign journalists were also injured in a similar mishap during the opening ceremony.

Medals confirmed

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh made a bright start in the badminton competition of the 11th South Asian Games as the hosts confirmed their semifinal berth in both men's and women's team events at the wooden floor gymnasium yesterday.

In today's semifinal, men's team will face India while the women's team will meet Sri Lanka at the same venue. The host shuttlers started their mission with a target of clinching any medal and winning the quarterfinals, they have

confirmed at least the bronze medals. Bangladesh failed to get in the medals tally in the last competition in Colombo.

On way to the semifinal, the men's team demolished Maldives in straight 5 sets in the quarterfinal. Saif Uddin beat Hassan Afsheen Shaheem 21-14, 21-12, Ahsun Habib Parash defeated Ajfaan Rasheed 21-16, 21-13 and Rais Uddin beat Nasheeu Sharafuddin 21-12, 21-10.

In the doubles, Rasel Kabir and Ahsun Habib Parash pair defeated Afsheen Shaheem and Ajfaan Rasheed pair 21-12, 21-11 while Anamul Haque and Hamil Ahmed Dulal won their battle against Riyaz Hussain and Nasheeu

Sharafuddin pair 21-19, 21-13. Bangladesh women's team had to toil hard before beating Pakistan 3-2 to enter into the last four.

Shapla Akter beat Palwasha Basheer 21-15, 16-21, 21-15, Alina Sultana beat Aisha Akram 21-12, 21-17 but Konika Rani Adhikari lost to Sara Khan 21-15, 16-21, 14-21. Konika, however, paired with Shapla to beat Palwasha Basheer and Aisha Akram pair 21-17, 21-13 while Alina and Jebunnesha Shima lost to Sara and Anika Rannar pair 17-21, 20-22.

In the other men's quarterfinal, Sri Lanka earned a hard fought 3-2 victory over Pakistan.

Zoran's boys win big

ANISUR RAHMAN



Bangladesh made a perfect start in the football event of the 11th South Asian Games when the hosts handed an emphatic 3-0 defeat to two-time champions Nepal at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Midfielder Mamunul Islam gave Bangladesh a first-half lead before defender Atiqur Rahman and substitute striker Mithun Chowdhury struck one apiece to seal the fate of the game after Maldives had recorded a solitary-goal win over Bhutan, thanks to a late goal from star medio Ashfaq

Ali, in the earlier match of the day.

All attention was on how Bangladesh would fare under their new Serbian coach Zoran Djordjevic with a preparation of just two weeks. But Zoran's boys not only passed the exam, but also impressed everyone with better movement, neat passing and quick response in both attack and defence, which was somewhat absent in Bangladesh's matches of the SAFF Championship.

With debutants defender Mintu Sheikh, Rezaul Karim, wingers Yousuf and Shakil Ahmed, Bangladesh got off to a vigorous start and went ahead in just the eighth minute when Shakil provided a

minus for Mamunul from the left and the promising Mohammedan playmaker let loose a fierce shot from top of the box past Nepalese goalkeeper Bikash Mallah, who, later thwarted an effort from Zahid Hasan Emily in the 17th minute.

Nepal played with their usual crisp passing to threaten the Bangladesh backline which was marshalled by Wali Faisal, Nasir and debutant Mintu and Rezaul. They almost snatched an equaliser in the 25th minute when Suresh Shrestha shrugged off defender Wali to enter the right-side of the box to release an angular pass for Jumanu Rai, who however was late to

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Aussie Open Serena's

AFP, Melbourne



Defending champion and top seed Serena Williams powered to her fifth Australian Open title and 12th Grand Slam when she beat a brave Justine Henin 6-4, 3-6, 6-2 on Saturday.

Williams took a tight first set then had to hold off a charging Henin to deny the

Belgian a fairytale ending to a thrilling final on Rod Laver Arena.

"Congratulations to Justine for having such a fabulous tournament and giving me such a run today. It was such a great final, it could have gone any way and I definitely think she's back," Williams said.

Henin said that despite the loss she was still elated at what

she had achieved.

"Of course I'm disappointed, I mean, when you lose in the final of a Grand Slam, especially in three sets, and I got a few opportunities that I wasn't able to take," she said.

"But this feeling of disappointment cannot take advantage on all the things I've done in the last few weeks.

"And it's just more than what I could expect. I just have to remember that.

"I'm sure there will be a lot of positive things I can think about in a few days," she added.

"It's been almost perfect. Just the last step, I couldn't make it."

Williams claimed her 12th Grand Slam with the win, putting her alongside fellow American Billie Jean King on the list of all time major winners.

It was fitting that the final was played in front of King and Australian great Margaret Smith Court, who won a record 24 Grand Slams and handed Williams her trophy.

Williams was made to work hard by the tenacious Henin, playing only her second tournament since coming out of an 18-month retirement and needing a wildcard to enter.

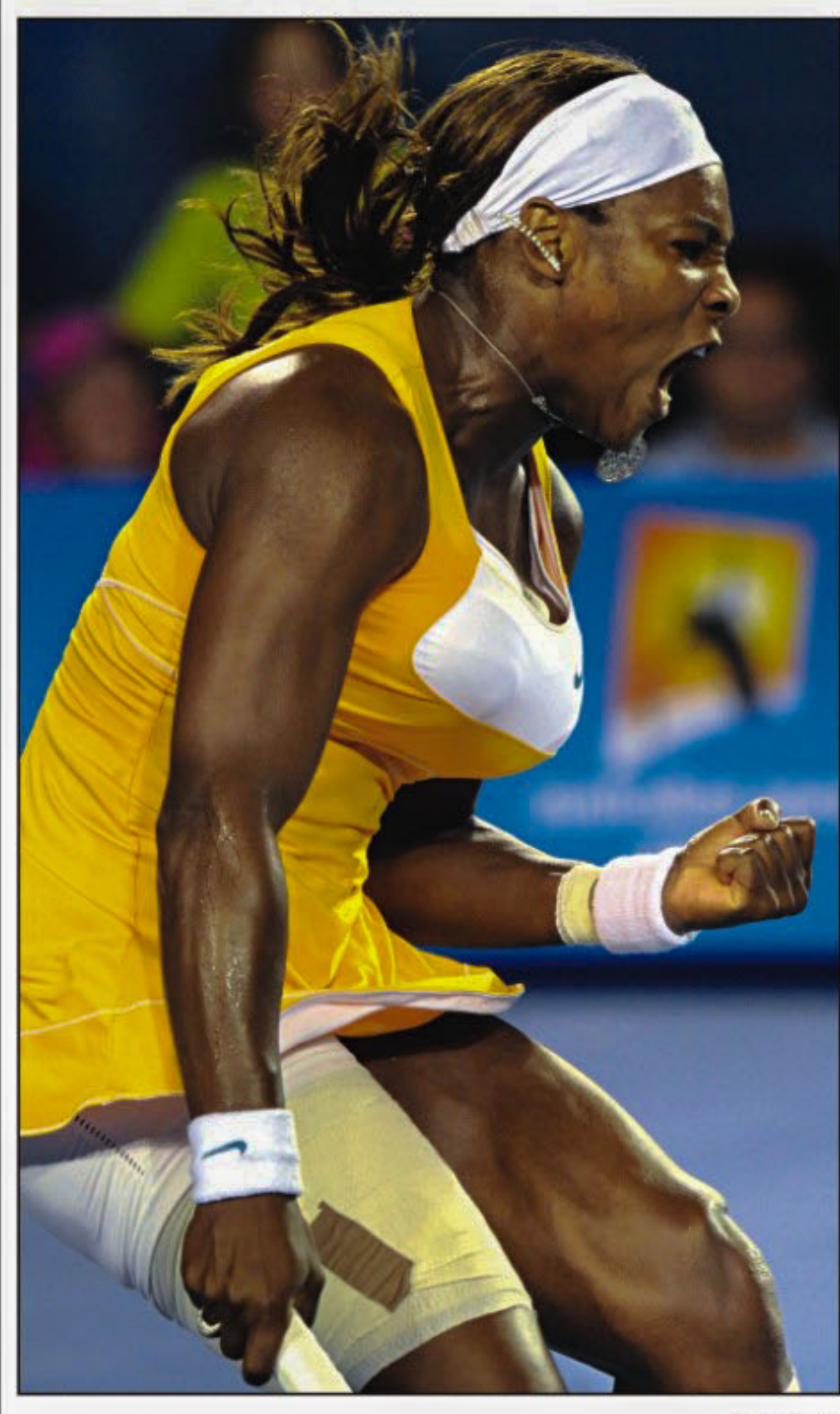
In the end it was her sheer power that won out as her huge serves and booming groundstrokes eventually wore Henin down and forced costly errors.

Williams served better throughout, making 64 percent of her first serves as opposed to Henin's 55 percent, with many of those unplayable.

Henin showed, however, that she is still a real force and capable of adding to her seven Grand Slam titles.

Williams opened the match with a swinging ace but struggled after that, her first two

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World number one Serena Williams of USA exults winning a point against Justine Henin of Belgium during their Australian Open final in Melbourne on Saturday. Serena won her 12th Grand Slam defeating Henin 6-4, 3-6, 6-2.

PHOTO: AFP