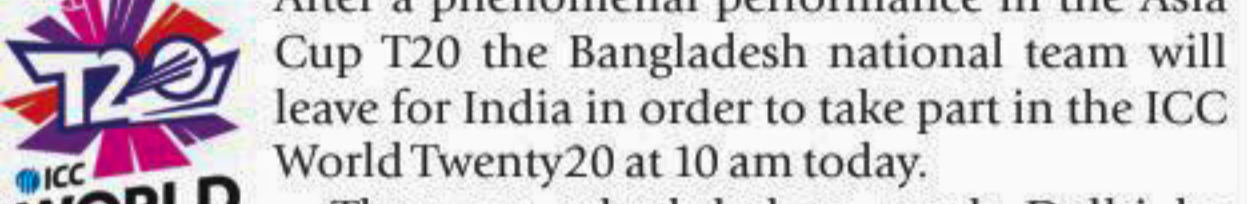




# Tigers head for India today

## Mustafizur expected to be fit for first match

SPORTS REPORTER



After a phenomenal performance in the Asia Cup T20 the Bangladesh national team will leave for India in order to take part in the ICC World Twenty20 at 10 am today.

They are scheduled to reach Delhi by noon and from there they will board a chartered flight to Dharamsala, where they will play their first World Cup game against the Netherlands on March 9. On March 11 they will face Ireland and on March 13 they will take on Oman. For the Tigers to proceed to the Super 10 they will need to finish on top of the group.

The talking point prior to their departure for the World Cup has been Mustafizur Rahman's fitness concerns. The pace bowler suffered a side strain during the Sri Lanka game in the Asia Cup and as a result was ruled out of the remainder of the tournament.

However, the good news is that the pacer is doing a lot better than he initially was. According to the team physio, his pain had decreased by a huge margin and the team management is confident that the bowler can take part in the competition from the first game.



MUSTAFIZUR RAHMAN

That will come as a relief for most Bangladesh fans as many feared that the left-armer would take at least two weeks to recover. However, as per the current scenario, the bowler is likely to be fit to play the Netherlands game.

Bangladesh's bowling unit fired throughout the Asia Cup with the likes of Al-Amin Hossain, Shakib Al Hasan and Taskin Ahmed hitting form.

However, the effect that Mustafizur can have in the World Cup is something totally different. With the left-hander in the side, the Tigers, despite their good run, will be a lot calmer while playing against the Associate member nations in the first round of the competition.

His cutters and other variations will be aspects that Bangladesh's first-round opponents will have never faced before and it will definitely be an advantage for the Tigers.

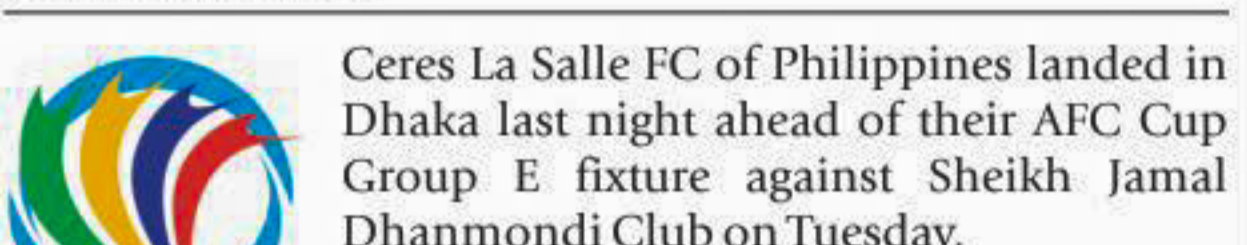
Despite the good performances, Bangladesh skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza during press conferences in the Asia Cup, repeatedly stated the importance of Mustafizur and the reason behind that is obvious: in the past year, he has been the go-to bowler for the Tigers whenever the team needed wickets.

With the team scheduled to reach Dharamsala today evening, they will have an entire day to get accustomed to the slightly chilly conditions there. The practice matches that have already taken place there indicated that there was a bit of grass on the wickets, which is something that the Tigers will have to be prepared for.

FIRST ROUND FIXTURES			
Date	Match	Venue	Time
Mar 9	Bangladesh v Netherlands	Dharamsala	3:30pm
Mar 11	Bangladesh v Ireland	Dharamsala	8:00pm
Mar 13	Bangladesh v Oman	Dharamsala	8:00pm

# Ceres FC land in Dhaka

SPORTS REPORTER



Ceres La Salle FC of Philippines landed in Dhaka last night ahead of their AFC Cup Group E fixture against Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club on Tuesday.

A 26-member Ceres La Salle came to Dhaka on the back of a surprise 1-2 defeat against Global Manila in their last domestic league match on March 3, though they have an impressive run in their United Football League campaign with some stunning results against Manila Nordas (15-0) and Pasargad FC (9-0).

The Philippine champions threw away an early lead to play out a 2-2 draw in their first AFC Cup match against Selangor FC two weeks ago and they are now banking on good results against Sheikh Jamal, who are still far away from the performance that they put up in the play-off round of the AFC Cup as a 4-0 drubbing at the hands of Tampines Rovers of Singapore evidenced.

Ceres La Salle coach Ali Go however believes they are going to face tough challenge from the home side.

"It's not going to be an easy game. They [Sheikh Jamal] lost to Tampines 4-0 but I think they made key mistakes. I scouted their team and they have at least five or six good players who can really make an impact. The foreign players are also very good. We have to play our best to win the game." Go was quoted as saying on the club's official website.

Ali Go is also a bit worried about his team selection following problems with fitness.

"I think some of our players are a little tired and injured. Also we have only two training sessions before the game. We had a nine-hour flight to Bangladesh but hopefully everyone can recover and then we have to give one hundred per cent to win this game" he added.

# Spectacular spectators

SAKEB SUBHAN



It will be a hard ask to find a more indomitable section of people than a Bangladesh cricket crowd.

Yesterday, the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur was packed to half its capacity by 6:15pm, 75 minutes before the start of the Asia Cup T20 final. Tens of thousands were waiting outside to at least be in the vicinity when their beloved Tigers' play their second major final.

It was then that a fierce storm descended upon Mirpur, so fierce that scaffolding around one of the electronic scoreboards was torn off. Then the ground was engulfed in darkness as the floodlights remained off for more than 20 minutes.

Approximately 10,000 people gathered together in darkness with nothing more than cell phone lights in hand is a legitimate security hazard. Those outside had no shelter from the rain. Such conditions may have been enough to drive most crowds away, but after the hour-long downpour relented, the faithful not only came back but brought with them more of their kind, so that the ground was near full by 7:45pm, with the covers still on.

Those still stranded outside may have thought that the match had started, so loud were the cheers that greeted each cover being taken off. One of the largest cheers of the night came when the players came out to warm up a few minutes past eight.

Yet, in sharp contrast to the happy on-field events that led Bangladesh to the finals, the game's lifeblood, the spectators, had a much rougher time getting here. The ticket-buyers' clash with police on Saturday cast a pall over the festivities surrounding the Tigers' success.

Yesterday, the streets of Mirpur-10 and Mirpur-2 were filled with fans. The islands were lined with people sitting and looking at those lucky enough to get their hands on some tickets. There were also small crowds gathered around scalpers, who were making a killing.

"I don't have a ticket," said Maruf, a small business operator. "I queued at the Mirpur branch of UCB (United Commercial Bank, the official ticket selling partners of the event) all night, and still wasn't able to buy a ticket."

Maruf had started queuing on Saturday night along with at least 250 others, he said. But he made it to the ground anyway, on the off chance that he will get to cheer on his team. But even buying from scalpers was not an option.

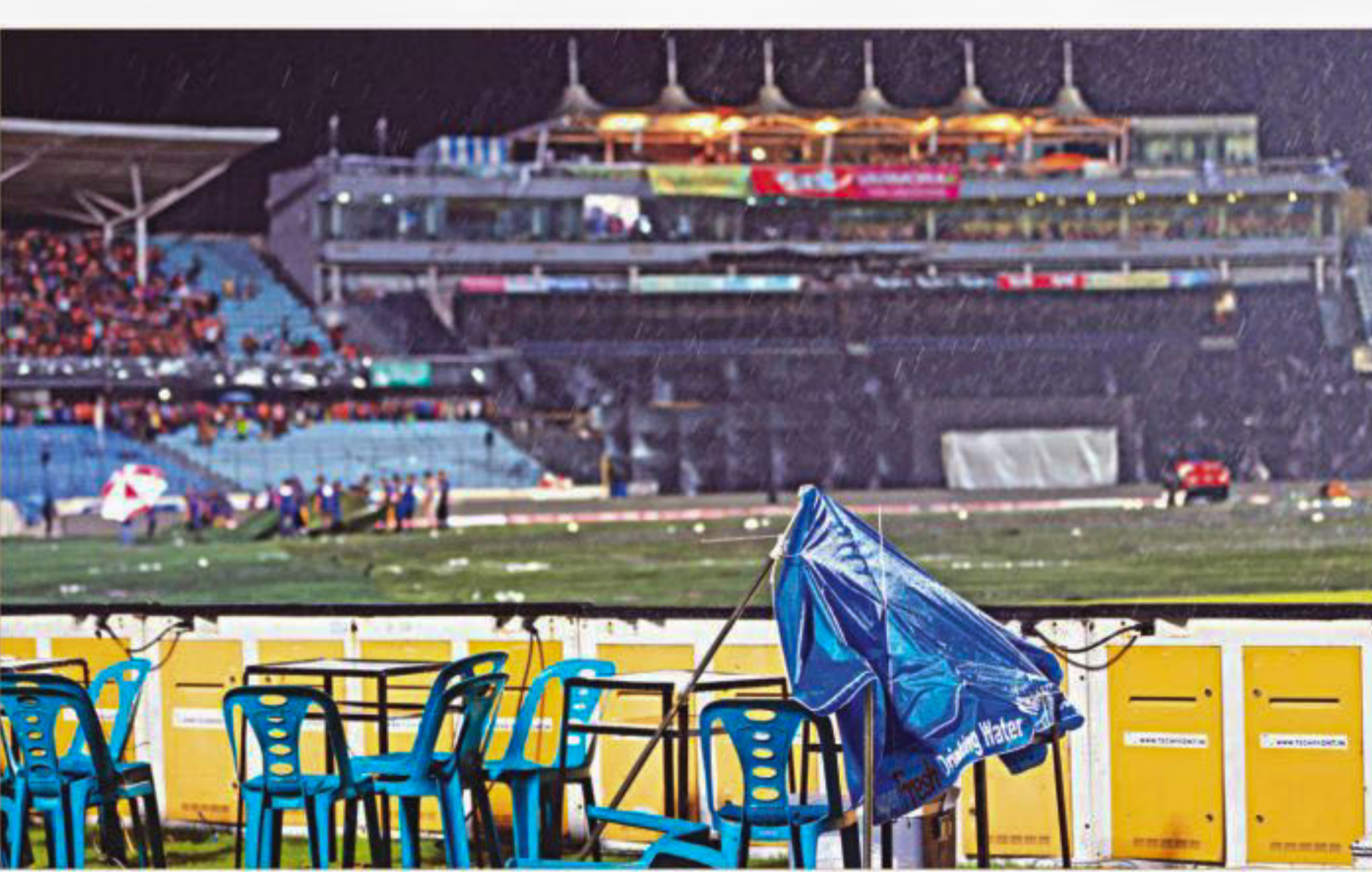
"They are selling Tk 250 or Tk 400 tickets for more than Tk 4,000," Maruf lamented, and offered a solution. "They should make tickets available on the net or on cell phones. So many countries do it."

There were many others like Maruf. Saiful and Riman, two brothers who work in the private sector, were sitting in front of Gate 2 of the stadium, looking wistfully at the ticket-holders waiting patiently in line.

"We queued along with 500 others through last night, and the number swelled to a thousand by the morning. But all we got was the police throwing hot water at us when it turned out that a majority of us would have to leave empty-handed," related Saiful.

Even those who got tickets were not spared, with some reports emerging of gate officials taking the ticket and shoving spectators through the gate without handing it back. There were also reports of fake tickets being sold.

Ticketing troubles have become a constant sub-plot of Bangladesh's cricket events. It is high time that the powers that be start treating the game's real heroes with the respect they deserve.



Fans gathered in Mirpur did eventually witness a match, but not before facing some trials and tribulations. However, once the rain subsided, they were back in the seats and in full voice. Rain had earlier caused a bit of havoc to the ground. PHOTOS: STAR

# Messi extends Barca record

AFP, Madrid



A Lionel Messi-inspired Barcelona tightened their grip on the La Liga title race with a comprehensive 4-0 win at Eibar on Sunday top open up an 11-point lead at the top.

Munir El Haddadi tapped home the opener from Luis Suarez's cross before Messi doubled Barca's advantage with a brilliant individual effort just before half-time.

Messi doubled his tally from the penalty spot before Suarez lashed home the fourth six minutes from time.

Barca's 11th consecutive league win also stretches their record unbeaten run to 36 games.

Atletico Madrid can close the gap at the top to eight points when they visit Gary Neville's Valencia later on Sunday.

Real Madrid remain 12 points adrift of Barca in third despite Cristiano Ronaldo's four-goal show in a 7-1 demolition of Celta Vigo on Saturday.

The European champions were without the suspended Neymar, who made the most of his free weekend to return to his native Brazil.

However, El Haddadi made the most of his rare chance to start with a simple finish at the back post eight minutes in after Messi's brilliant pass had played in Suarez

behind the Eibar defence.

Suarez was surpassed by Ronaldo in the fight to be La Liga's top scorer and the Uruguayan look determined to hit back early on, but fluffed his lines with just Abel Riesgo to beat two minutes later.

Eibar then enjoyed a concerted period of pressure and were desperately unlucky not to level when Borja Baston's cross hit Sergio Busquets and flew inches past the far post.

Yet, just when Eibar looked the most likely to score, Messi killed the game as a contest as he intercepted the ball in midfield and drove towards the Eibar goal before firing into the far corner for his 20th league goal of the season.

The second-half was far shorter on goalmouth action, but there was time for Messi to put Barca's recent troubles from the penalty spot behind him when Ivan Ramis blocked the Argentine's cross with his hand.

Messi took responsibility after Suarez had missed from the spot against Rayo Vallecano in midweek and coolly dispatched the penalty for his 35th goal of the season.

And Suarez finally got the goal he craved to move back to within one of Ronaldo in the scoring charts with a brilliant nutmeg of Capa before smashing the ball into the far corner.

That goal also took Suarez, Messi and Neymar's combined tally for the season to 100.

# Zidane hails Ronaldo

GOAL.COM



Zinedine Zidane described Cristiano Ronaldo as unique after his four goals in Real Madrid's 7-1 thrashing of Celta Vigo.

The Portugal star was on the receiving end of jeers from some sections of the Santiago Bernabeu support following comments he made about his team-mates after the 1-0 defeat to Atletico Madrid, but he responded with a stunning performance on Saturday, which saw him move second in the all-time goalscorer standings in La Liga on 252 strikes.

Ronaldo scored a superb long-range goal and converted a free-kick from 25 yards before two close-range finishes capped a superb display, and Zidane considers his ability to score from distance to be unparalleled in the modern game.



"Only he has it [that strike]. I never scored four goals. It was important for him before the Champions League," the coach said afterwards.

"I'm happy with Cristiano's performance. Whistles are part of football, they don't only whistle Cristiano. The supporters are demanding and always want more from the players. But that's good. And they know Cristiano. He's capable of scoring four. He's unique."

# KFC WOMEN'S FOOTBALL BJMC top group

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation (BJMC) handed holders Mymensingh a 2-1 defeat in the KFC National Women's Football League at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

BJMC, who humiliated Rangpur 21-0 in the previous match, went ahead through a sixth minute strike from Lipi, before Sheuli levelled the margin three minutes into the second half.

National striker Sabina Khatun, who struck 12 goals against Rangpur, netted the winning goal in the 68th minute to help BJMC emerge as Group A champions with nine points from three matches. Mymensingh finished behind BJMC.

In the day's other match, Rangpur defeated Rajbari 9-3. Laboni struck four and Akhi scored a brace while Sultana, Asha and Khadiza netted one goal apiece for Rangpur. Soheli slotted three goals for Rajbari.

# WOMEN'S HOCKEY Jhenaidah clinch title

SPORTS REPORTER

Jhenaidah were crowned champions of the women's hockey competition after a 1-0 win over Narail in the final at the Maulana Bhashani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Ananya Biswas struck the decisive goal against two-time champions Narail in the 15th minute to clinch the trophy of the third edition of the tournament, which was held after three years with the participation of nine district teams.

# United slip up, Liverpool prevail

AFP, London



Juan Mata was sent off as Manchester United's hopes of Champions League qualification were dealt a serious setback in a 1-0 defeat at West Bromwich Albion on Sunday.

The Spaniard received two quick-fire bookings mid-way through the first half, for blocking a free-kick and then taking a swipe at Darren Fletcher, and West Brom made their numerical advantage count in the 66th minute when Salomon Rondon netted his fourth goal in six Premier League games.

It ended United's recent revival of four straight wins and left Louis van Gaal's side in sixth place, three points below the Champions League berths having played a game more than fourth-place Manchester City.

United are now in danger of being caught by forthcoming Europa League opponents Liverpool, who are three points behind them with a game in hand following a last-gasp 2-1 win at Crystal Palace.

Mata was shown his first yellow card in the 24th minute at The Hawthorns for blocking

Fletcher's free-kick and saw red two minutes later for clumsily swinging his foot at the former United midfielder.

Craig Dawson almost put West Brom in front immediately, only for his ambitious 25-yard lob to fall inches wide of the left-hand post.

Having survived until half-time, United started the second half strongly and threatened through young forwards Marcus Rashford and Jesse Lingard.

But West Brom claimed the points when Venezuelan striker Rondon gathered Sebastian Pocognoli's drilled left-wing cross before slamming home left-footed to lift Tony Pulis's men 15 points clear of the bottom three, effectively securing their survival.

Earlier, substitute Christian Benteke won and scored a 96th-minute penalty as 10-man Liverpool came from behind to win 2-1 at Palace.

Joe Ledley's 48th-minute strike and Liverpool midfielder James Milner's second-half dismissal for two bookable offences looked to have set Palace on course for a first win in 12 league matches.

But a slip by Palace goalkeeper Alex McCarthy

gifted Roberto Firmino a 72nd-minute equaliser, before Damien Delaney's rash challenge on Benteke enabled the Belgium striker to net the winner from the spot.

"You can try (to make changes), but the rest is passion," Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp told Sky Sports at Selhurst Park.

"Football is like this. You make a plan at the end, but the lads did great. This is the third league win in a row. I can't believe how it feels -- really good, a big moment for us."

Liverpool climbed two places to seventh after recording a third successive league win for the first time in a year.

Palace manager Alan Pardew, whose side have now gone 12 games without a league win, criticised referee Andre Marriner's decision to award Benteke a penalty.

Delaney pulled out of a sliding challenge on Benteke inside the box, but the Irishman had already gone to ground and replays showed that his right knee had clipped the Belgian's left foot.

"(Benteke) is looking for it. Our player is pulling out of it," said Pardew, whose side are nine points above the relegation zone.

"If the linesman gives it for the touch of the knee in the last minute, I think it is harsh."

