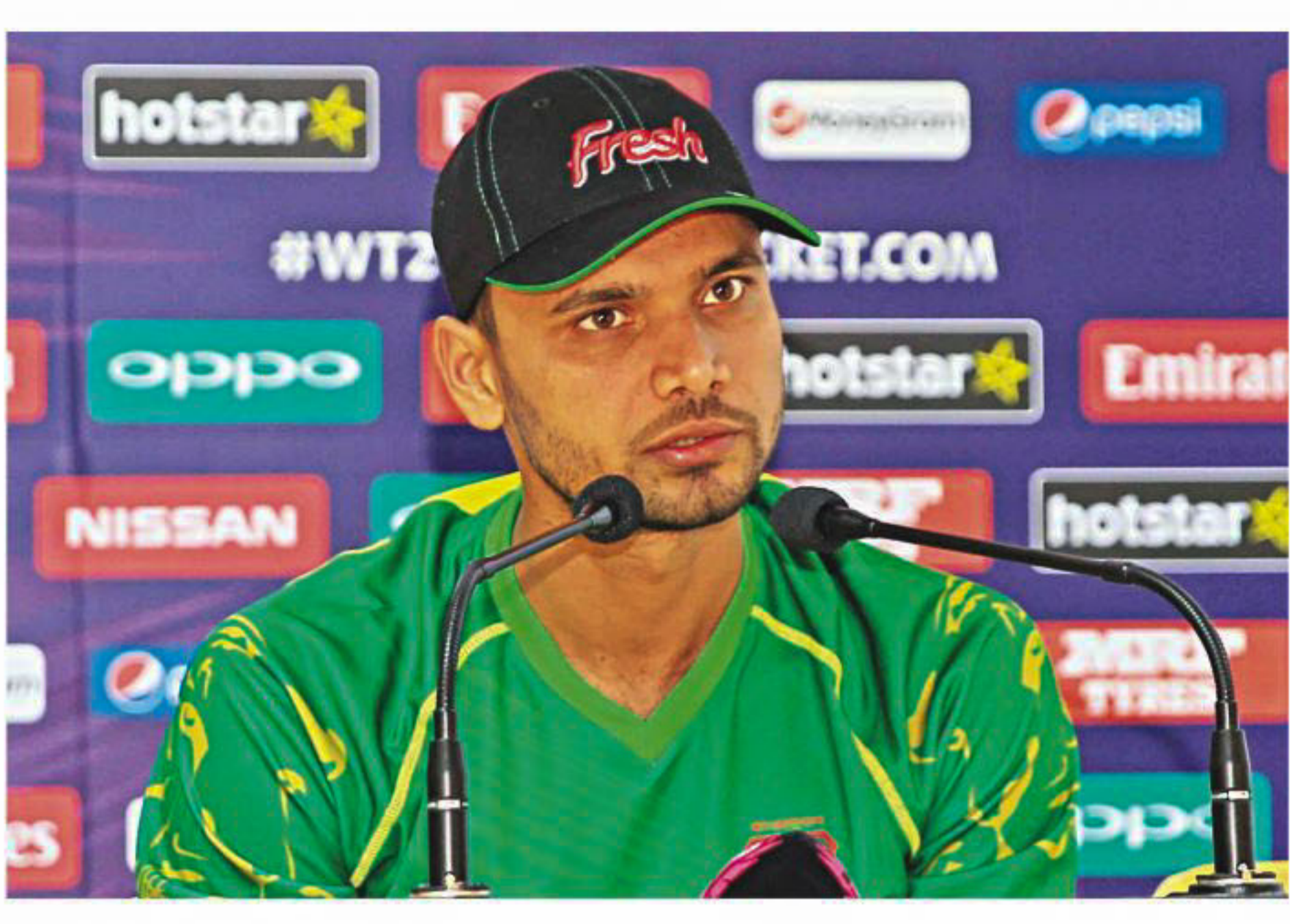


I don't want to buy his [Mahmudullah Riyad's] idea of taking our three qualifying games as a build-up for the main event. I'm against being overconfident. We will play our next game against the Netherlands as intensely as we did against India in the Asia Cup final.

Mashrafe Bin Mortaza
Bangladesh captain



I think Bangladesh are clear favourites. But that won't affect us in terms of pressure. They were fantastic in the Asia Cup and well deserved finalists. They've got some extremely talented cricketers and have been in good form. It's pretty exciting to play a team at the top of their game.

Peter Borren
Netherlands captain



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Bangladesh captain Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (L) and Netherlands skipper Peter Borren (R) speak to the media ahead of their crucial first-round encounter of the World T20 in Dharamsala yesterday. Both the experienced players, from their respective sides, exuded plenty of confidence during the press conference. PHOTOS: BCB

Delay likely for Mustafiz unveiling

AL-AMIN from Dharamsala

The sun appeared with all its grace on Tuesday morning much to the relief of the Bangladesh team, which was not certain of getting the opportunity for their only outdoor training session due to heavy overnight rain before their opening ICC World T20 qualifier against the Netherlands today.

With the Dhaladhar (white peak) mountain range in the background, the Tigers had their much needed practice, albeit without young pacer Mustafizur Rahman.

While the rest sweat it out either with bat and ball in a two-and-a-half hours session, the left-arm pace bowler was involved in different fitness drills under team physio Bayjedul Islam Khan. After briefly standing at the bowling mark, he was seen doing all the stretching exercises to heal the side strain a week ago.

The 20-year-old actually did not bowl a single ball in the nets where Taskin Ahmed, Al-Amin Hossain and Abu Haider Rony ran in with the white cherry at full force. Although the team management left the issue of Mustafizur's participation against Holland in the hands of the technical staff, it was understood that his debut for the

ICC flagship event would be delayed.

All-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, who spent a good amount of time batting in the nets, got a painful blow on his right hand while facing a young Indian fast bowler. However, the left-hander, who has been going through a torrid time both with the bat and ball and had a forgettable performance in the Asia Cup final against India, returned quickly in the nets. Mushfiqur Rahim as usual batted extra time with Ruwan Kalpage performing the bowler's role. Mushfiqur played some brilliant shots (no slog-sweep) against the Bangladesh pace trio, most of them either through the covers or straight over the bowler's head. He was middling the ball so nicely that it was quite inexplicable why of late he is not clicking during a match. The right-hander also played some pull shots, which could be handy on a wicket like Dharamsala's.

And if you take the words of the ground's curator for

INDIAN RHYTHMS

The Tigers, a supporting act

AL-AMIN from Dharamsala

When an Indian journalist asked Mashrafe Bin Mortaza whether the cut-off time for the ICC World T20 rankings almost two years back was fair for his team, the Bangladesh captain could only say that it was something out of their hands. But the funnier part of Bangladesh's India tour for the T20 World Cup is that it's the Tiger's first visit on Indian soil after a long gap of ten years.

Bangladesh last played in India in the ICC Champion's Trophy in 2006. In that context this trip to Dharamsala is not only the first for every Bangladesh player but also a first for many on Indian soil. It also provides Bangladesh an opportunity to turn the tide on years of non-compliance from the BCCI to accommodate a bilateral series under the pretext of 'non-profitability'.

Although Dharamsala is already abuzz with the prospect of an India-Pakistan tie here on March 19, the Tigers can seize the chance to impress the upper-reach audience of Kangra valley. During the press briefing an enthusiastic reporter asked Mashrafe how it would feel like to play in front of almost empty stands after the Asia Cup amidst a raucous home crowd. But it is not that dull for Bangladesh because if you ask someone coming from the ticket counter with tickets in hand you will discover that those are tickets for the Bangladesh game.

"I have bought 10 tickets of Bangladesh games. I knew it would be very tough to get tickets for the India-Pakistan game. I think Bangladesh is an exciting team, they are playing very good cricket," said Sharfaraz, a young native of Dharamsala.

IMPENDING POPULATION EXPLOSION
Dharamsala is a municipal corporation in Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh. Located in the upper reaches of the valley, it is home to about 40,000 people. It's a popular tourist destination for its scenic beauty as well as the home of exiled Tibet leader Dalai Lama. Of late the HPCA (Himachal Pradesh Cricket Association) ground has attracted cricket fans from all over because of its magnificent surroundings.

But cricket, it appears, is causing great damage to Dharamsala's tranquility and the laid-back way of life. Think of an India-Pakistan game played here at the 24,000 capacity ground; already the online demand is for 1.83 lakh tickets. People living here believe that the city, surrounded by hills, simply cannot accommodate that many tourists. A recent study reveals that it has got 3000 accommodation facilities that include hotels at McLeod Ganj, which is located as high as 2024 metres above sea level. Dharamsala is a magnificent addition in the short list of spectacular venues. But it is certainly not a place for a commercial bonanza.



Bangladesh pace sensation Mustafizur Rahman, who is in the process of recovering from a side strain injury, performs a few routine stretches during Bangladesh's training in Dharamsala yesterday. He isn't likely to feature against the Netherlands today. PHOTO: BCB

Zim, Afghans win openers

AFP, Nagpur

Zimbabwe and Afghanistan got off to winning starts on the opening day of the World Twenty20 after respectively overcoming a scandal-hit Hong Kong and a spirited Scotland in Nagpur Tuesday.

Vusi Sibanda struck a fluent half-century to help Zimbabwe defeat Hong Kong by 14 runs in the first group encounter of Round 1.

Stung by a corruption charge prior to the start of the sixth edition of the tournament, Hong Kong had their moments in the game but failed to capitalise.

Electing to field, Hong Kong's bowlers made early inroads but Sibanda held fort with a 46-ball 59 to guide his side to 158 for eight.

Sibanda's 61-run fifth wicket partnership with Malcolm Waller and a late blitz by Elton Chigumbura ensured the total remained beyond the grasp of Hong Kong, who in turn could only manage 144 for six in their 20 overs.

In the second match of the day, favourites Afghanistan rode on an entertaining fifty from Mohammad Shahzad to beat Scotland by 14 runs.

Shahzad (61) to post 170 for five. Wicketkeeper-batsman Shahzad 39-ball stay, laced with five boundaries and three sixes, gave the side enough momentum to keep the total out of the reach of Scotland, who could only muster 156 for five in their 20 overs.

SCORES IN BRIEF
ZIMBABWE: 158 for 8 in 20 overs (Masakadza



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20, Sibanda 59, Waller 26, Chigumbura 30 not out; Afzal 1-19, Aizaz 2-33)

HONG KONG: 144 for 6 in 20 overs (Atkinson 53, Chapman 19, Afzal 31 not out; Tiripano 2-27, Chatara 2-28)

Result: Zimbabwe won by 14 runs.

Player-of-the-match: Vusi Sibanda.

AFGHANISTAN: 170 for 5 in 20 overs (Shahzad 61, Noor 17, Asghar 55 not out; Evans 1-24)

SCOTLAND: 156 for 5 in 20 overs (Munsey 41, Coetzer 40, Machan 36, Mommsen 17 not out; Rashid 2-28)

Result: Afghanistan won by 14 runs.

Player-of-the-match: Md Shahzad.

Pacers dominate Day Two

SPORTS REPORTER



While the fifth round of the Bangladesh Cricket League, the country's premier first-class cricket tournament, began on a slightly balanced note on Monday, the scenarios of both the matches however changed quite significantly yesterday.

At the end of day two, Mominul Haque's Islami Bank East Zone and Mosharraf Hossain-led Central Zone were in firm control of their respective games which were held at the Sheikh Kamal International Cricket Stadium in Cox's Bazar.

Starting the day on 277 for 5, East Zone were bundled out for 392. Alok Kapali, who had reached his century on Monday, added plenty more to his account and finished his innings on 154. A good whip from number eight Rahatul Ferdous further piled on the runs for the Easterners. Rahatul smacked two sixes and five fours in his 85-ball 62 and remained unbeaten at the end of the innings.

After the exchange, Naeem Islam-led BCB North Zone crumbled against East Zone's pacers who ran through their top order. Naeem was the only one who managed to put up some resistance, as he strutted his way to 43. Oddly enough, the heroes for East Zone yesterday were their quicker bowlers. Fresh out of the Under-19 team, Mohammad Saifuddin scalped three wickets, where as Kamrul Islam Rabbi, who was

recently selected in the national team, took three more. The one remaining scalp was taken by another fast bowler, Abu Jayed, a talented 22-year-old pacer.

Going into day three, East Zone should look to make the most of their good work and gain as big a lead as possible.

In the day's other game, Central Zone, buoyed by some good batting down the order, posted 425. They started the day on 289 for 5 with Sharifullah and Tanveer Haider at the crease. The two batsmen went about their merry way and took the team score to 347 before the stand was broken.

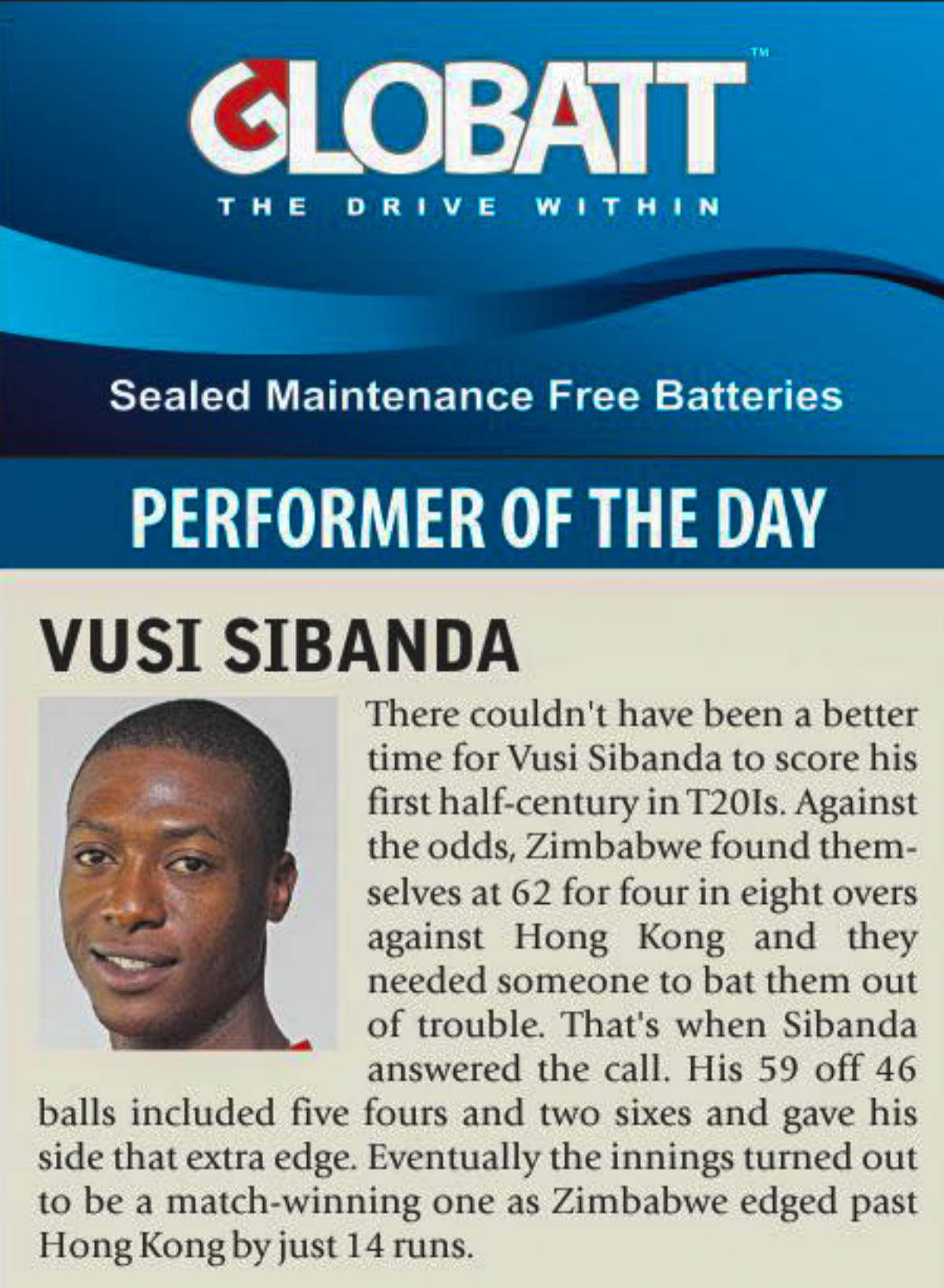
While Tanveer scored 84, Sharifullah posted 60. After their knocks, Mosharraf came in the end and added further woes for South Zone by smacking a 46. Abdur Razzak was the pick of the bowlers with a five-wicket haul for South Zone.

After the exchange, South Zone lost three wickets and ended the day on 131 for 3. Forhad Reza remained unbeaten on 50.

SCORES IN BRIEF

East Zone: 392 all out in 117.3 overs (Kapali 154, Mominul 94, Rahatul 62; Mamun 2-25, Delwar 2-61) v **North Zone:** 148 for 7 (Naeem 43, Sanjamul 25; Saifuddin 3-34, Kamrul 3-34, Jayed 1-43)

Central Zone: 425 all out in 136.4 overs (Rakibul 114, Tanveer 84, Sharifullah 60, Mosharraf 46; Razzak 5-138, Moynul 2-35) v **South Zone:** 131 for 3 (Forhad 50 not out, Mosaddek 29; Shahid 1-26, Shuvagata 1-30)



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PERFORMER OF THE DAY

VUSI SIBANDA

There couldn't have been a better time for Vusi Sibanda to score his first half-century in T20is. Against the odds, Zimbabwe found themselves at 62 for four in eight overs against Hong Kong and they needed someone to bat them out of trouble. That's when Sibanda answered the call. His 59 off 46 balls included five fours and two sixes and gave his side that extra edge. Eventually the innings turned out to be a match-winning one as Zimbabwe edged past Hong Kong by just 14 runs.