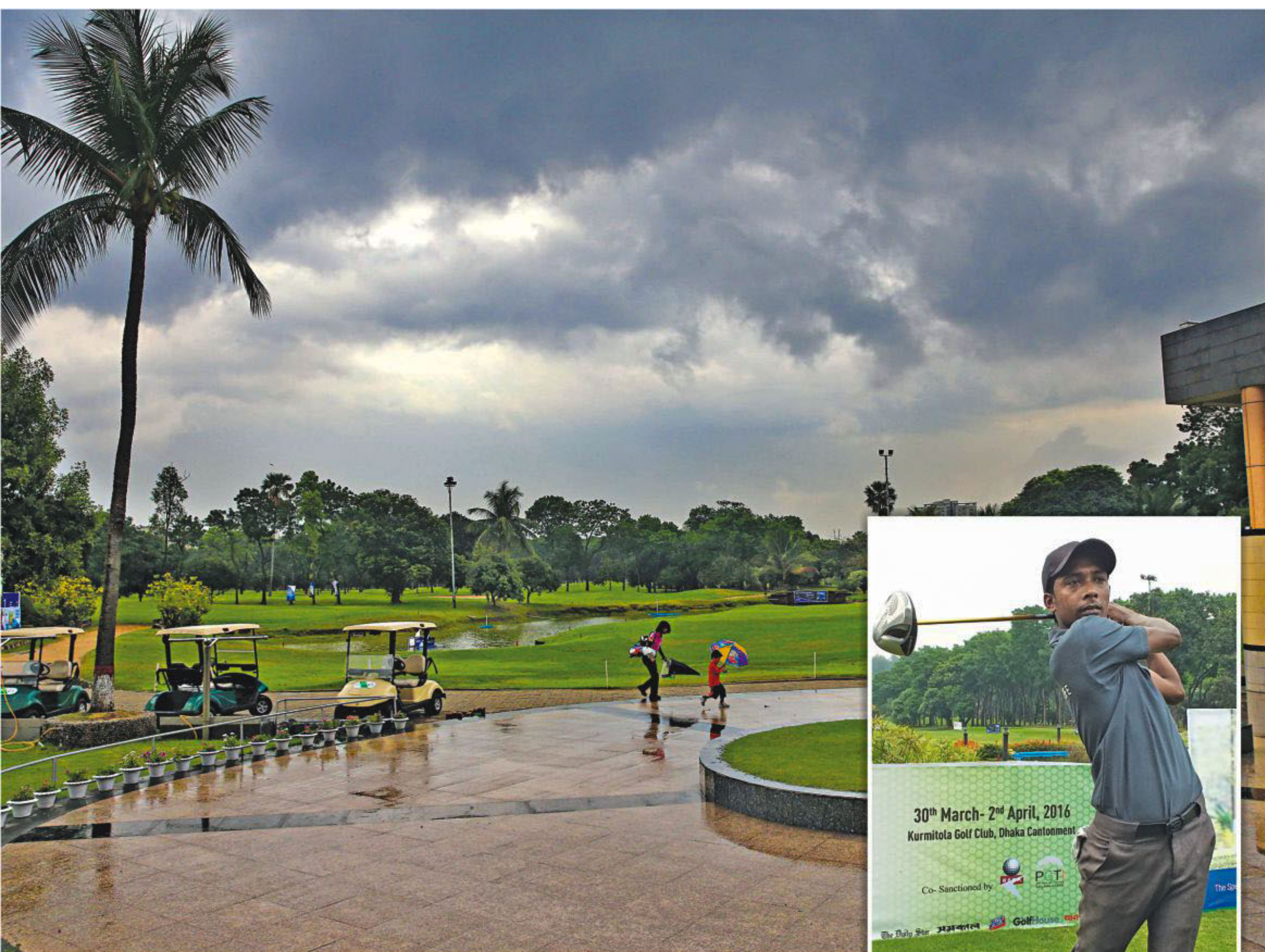


DHONI THE REPORTER

After his side was knocked out of the ICC World Twenty20 yesterday, India skipper MS Dhoni was asked the inevitable question of whether this was his last T20 match. Dhoni, perhaps tired of the oft-repeated query, went off script. "Come here, seriously, let's have some fun," Dhoni smilingly urged the Australian journalist, who sportingly enough joined the wicket-keeper batsman on stage. "Do you want me to retire?" Dhoni asked with his arm around the Australian, who replied in the negative. "I was hoping it was an Indian media guy, because I can't

really say to you 'do you have a brother or a son who can play for India as a wicketkeeper?' Do you think I am unfit, looking at me running," Dhoni continued his interrogation. "No, very fast," came the reply. "Do you think I can survive till the 2019 World Cup?" was Dhoni's last salvo in the unexpected reversal of roles. "Sure," was the monosyllabic answer from the ill-at-ease journo. "Then you have answered the question," said Dhoni, ending the cross-examination much to the mirth of all present.



Rain put a dampener on proceedings during the second day of the BTI Open at the Kurmitola Golf Club yesterday. (INSET) However, young Sajib Ali was in inspiring form and managed to grab the clubhouse lead at 10-under-par (134).

PHOTOS: FIROZ AHMED

Conflict steals focus from curtain-raiser

SPORTS REPORTER



The KFC Independence Cup, the season's curtain-raising tournament, begins today at the Bangabandhu National Stadium amid much conflict engendered by the clubs and the game's governing body being at loggerheads over eight footballers. The conflict arose when the eight players, who played for Sheikh Jamal DC in the previous season, signed for other clubs during the current transfer window. Sheikh Jamal's contention is that the players signed separate documents -- outside the framework provided by the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) -- pledging allegiance to the club, who filed a writ petition against the BFF to the high court, which sided with the Dhanmondi outfit. As the season gets underway after seven months since the completion of last season's professional football league, all focus should have been on the football but the stalemate has taken centre stage over the last four days, raising fears over whether the game's governing body can stage the tournament successfully. Ideally, the performance of the country's top footballers -- who underperformed on the national scene -- and the clubs' preparations after a long break should also have dominated discussions, but circumstances are far from ideal. So much so that there is still doubt, despite fixtures having been finalised, over whether the BFF will include three-time

premier league champions Sheikh Jamal who yesterday again demanded inclusion on the condition that those eight players be allowed to play for them. It will not come as a surprise if Sheikh Jamal are included after today's league committee meeting, which was earlier forced to add Arambagh KS after leaving them out of the draw initially. "We are positive about the inclusion of Sheikh Jamal but it will be difficult for us to include them if they give conditions because the issue of eight players awaits a resolution by the court," said BFF senior vice president Abdus Salam Murshedy. Although the hearing on the eight players will be held on Sunday after an appeal by BFF on Wednesday, the tournament is scheduled to get underway today with Team BJMC, quarterfinalists of the last edition of the Independence Cup held in 2014, taking on Rahmatganj MFS in the first match while Brothers Union play against the promoted Uttar Baridhara Club in the second match. The players' transfer window has been open for two months but most of the clubs completed their local players' registration formalities on the last day on March 20, thus they hardly got opportunity to prepare their sides. Even the clubs were busy completing their foreign players' registration formalities on the closing day yesterday. Despite the lack of preparation of the teams, Sheikh Russel KC, Abahani, Sheikh Jamal and Chittagong Abahani are comparatively ahead of the other eight teams as they have begun preparations a bit earlier than other teams.

NATIONS CUP CHESS Bangladesh outwit Sri Lanka

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh returned to winning ways in the Asian Nations Cup Chess tournament when they handed a 3-1 defeat to Sri Lanka in the third round held in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates on Wednesday. GM Niaz Murshed, GM Abudullah Al Rakib and GM Enamul Hossain Razib defeated IM Weerawardane Romesh, Priyankara Chamil and Edirisinghe Dulan respectively but FM Taibur Rahman lost against Subasinghe. Bangladesh, who are in third position along with five other teams with four points each, were scheduled to play against Kyrgyzstan last night.

Sajib grabs lead on rainy day

SPORTS REPORTER



Young Sajib Ali grabbed the clubhouse lead at 10-under-par (134) on a rain-affected second round of the BTI Open at the Kurmitola Golf Club yesterday. Sajib was one of those to complete the round on the rain-curtailed day, and the up-and-coming golfer made the most of the opportunity to return a card of four-under-par (68) to add to his 66 in the opening round. The 27-year-old golfer, who has been making his mark at domestic circuit over the last couple of years, had surged to a two-stroke lead over opening round leader Dulal Hossain, who settled for a one-under-par (71) in the second round. India's Sujjan Singh was in third position at seven-under-par (137) while a further shot back were four golfers including Jamal Hossain Mollah of Bangladesh. Play was suspended at 1:00pm due to lightning and the break lasted two and a half hours as only 63 golfers out of 120 could

complete 18 holes on Thursday. The remaining 57 will commence their second round at 7:00am this morning and the cut will be declared after the completion of the round before the third round begins. Sajib began his day with a sensational birdie chip-in on the first hole. The KGC golfer, playing his first season as a professional, then went on to gather six more birdies, but a double-bogey on the 15th, where his tee shot had landed inside the trees, meant his lead was within the reach of the chasing pack. "The chip-in on the first was a real morale-booster. Thereafter, I struck my irons well and didn't leave myself any long putts. The only error was on the 15th. I know another good score of four to five under in round three would make me a top contender," Sajib said at the end of his day's play. Two-time Asian Tour winner Siddikur Rahman could only complete 12 holes on day two. He was joint eighth on the leaderboard at five-under. The 31-year-old golfer was one-over through 12 with a birdie and two bogeys.

Arambagh Academy in final

SPORTS REPORTER

Arambagh Football Academy moved into the final of the Dhaka City Corporation (South & North) Pioneer Football League with a tense 3-2 win over Basundhara King at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday. Yeasin put Arambagh FA ahead in the fourth minute before Arif equalised in the 16th minute before his namesake in the opposition camp restored the lead for Arambagh six minutes later. Basundhara Kings levelled the margin again in the 66th minute with a strike from Mehdi. Fahim finally struck the winner in the 77th minute to set their final clash against the winners between Gazipur City FA and Uttara Recreation Club.



STAR ECONOMICAL BOWLER: India seamer Ashish Nehra was the only one among his teammates to keep the West Indian batsmen in check, conceding just 24 runs in his four overs and taking the wicket of Marlon Samuels.

PHOTO: AFP

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Eboue banned for one year

AFP, Zurich

FIFA on Thursday ordered Sunderland defender Emmanuel Eboué to serve a one year ban over fees owed to a former agent. The Ivory Coast international can automatically end the ban if he pays the money to his ex-agent Sebastien Boisseau, the world body said. FIFA said the ban covers "any football-related activity that will last for one year or until he pays the total outstanding amount owed to his former agent". A FIFA players status committee ruled in July 2013 in favour of Boisseau in a contractual dispute with Eboué. In September 2014, the FIFA disciplinary committee fined the Ivory Coast star 30,000 Swiss francs (\$30,000) for failing to comply with the decision. He was then given a 120-day "grace period" to settle the debt before Boisseau would be entitled to request that a one-year ban be imposed. Eboué appealed to the Court of Arbitration for Sport but lost. After a new deadline for payment was set and passed, Boisseau "requested that the one-year ban be imposed on Mr Eboué in accordance with the decision of the FIFA disciplinary committee", said a FIFA statement.

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