

SPORT

All positive at the start

SPORTS REPORTER

If there is one characteristic that is common in the public utterance of sportsmen, it is that of a positive outlook ahead of assignments. Perhaps it is a contrived projection, but elite sportsmen get to the level they occupy by backing themselves to the hilt. So when the Bangladesh squad were leaving yesterday for Sri Lanka for the tri-nation T20I series, there was a positive vibe emanating from a team that has lost four of their last five T20Is and also endured a torrid last six months in the other formats.

"The objective, of course, is to win the tournament," said skipper Mahmudullah Riyad at the Shahjalal International Airport before the team's departure. That is a brave statement because not only are T20Is their weakest format, they have lost all five T20Is they have played against one of their tri-series opponents -- India -- while having won just two and lost seven against hosts Sri Lanka.

"But we have a lot to prove and a lot to do to show how well we can do in this format," came the qualifier from Mahmudullah. "I said earlier that there is a question mark over us in this format. I think this [the tri-series] is a very good platform for us to prove ourselves. If we can bring out the best in everyone, then I think it is possible to do something very good."

Mahmudullah, filling in first as Test skipper and then as T20I skipper after Shakib Al Hasan picked up a finger injury in the ODI tri-series final against Sri Lanka on January 27, was aware that recent results -- losses in the tri-series final were followed by heavy defeats to the same opposition in the Test and T20I series -- are not very auspicious.

"Maybe we did not play as well as hoped for in the last series at home," said the right-hander. "But since it is the subcontinent and we have played a fair bit in Sri Lanka, hopefully we will play well."

There were similar noises from the juniors as well. Pacer Taskin Ahmed, dropped from all formats after a disastrous tour of South Africa in September-October last year, said that they were targeting a final spot. Wicketkeeper-batsman Nurul Hasan and pacer Rubel Hossain spoke about the need to face challenges and take it upon themselves to turn the ship around. The pace department will be under extra focus as they failed to make an impact in two sordid T20Is against Sri Lanka at home.

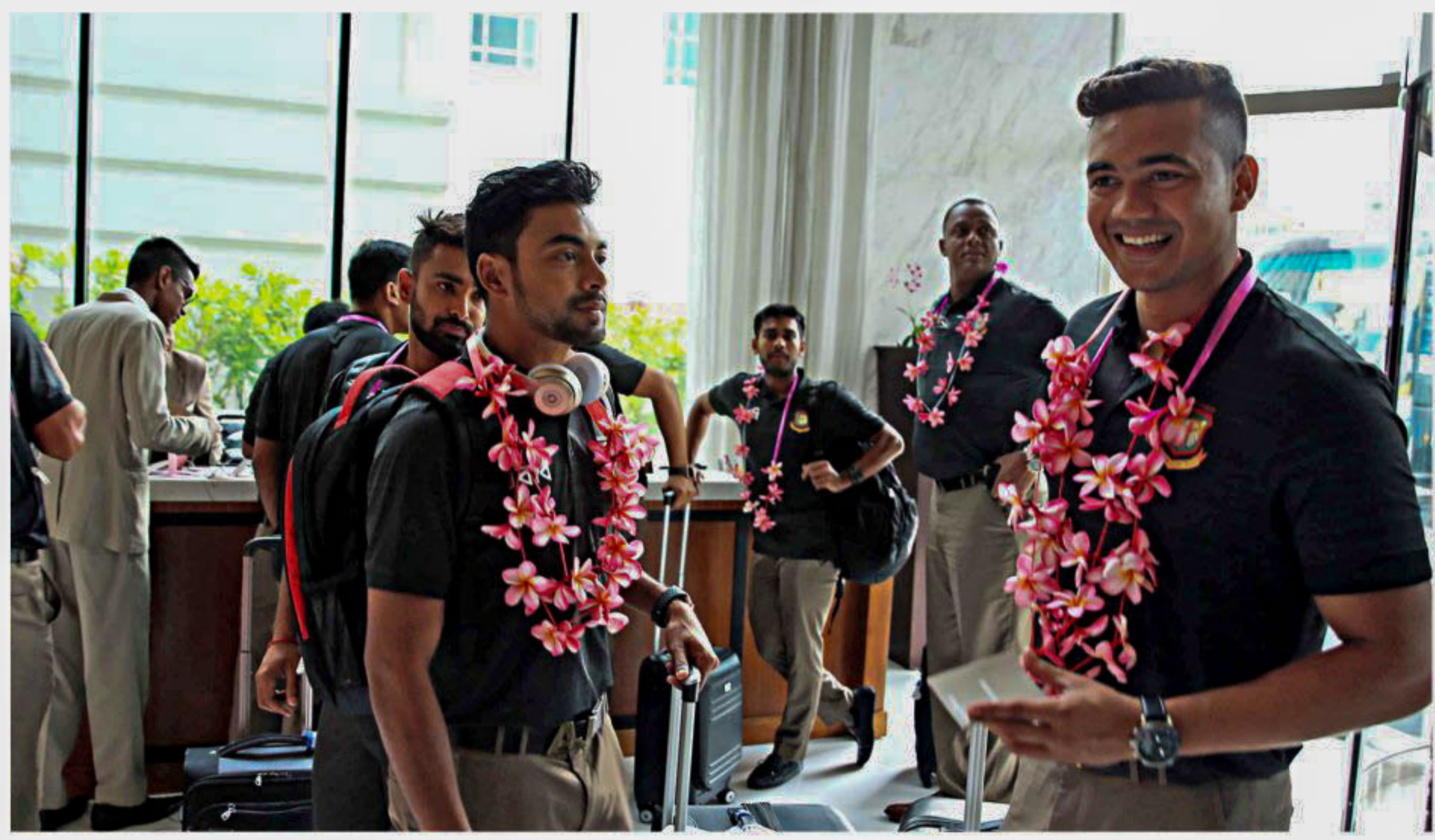
"It is a challenge for the pacers too," said Rubel when asked if the challenge was just for batsmen or for the pacers too. "T20s are short, but the pressure is high. I think the wickets in Sri Lanka will be very good [for batting] so we have to bowl sincerely."

While admitting that Shakib's absence will be keenly felt, a positive Mahmudullah saw opportunity in the void left by the talisman. "I think the start for us is very important; I always believe that if we can start well we will get the momentum. I think confidence is boosted in one match and that will impact how you will play in the next matches."

Given that their first match is against mighty India on Thursday, it will be interesting to see how long this positivity lasts.



There was a lot of optimism from Bangladesh skipper Mahmudullah Riyad (L) before the team departed for Sri Lanka yesterday and the good mood persisted when they reached their hotel in Colombo (R) a few hours later, but their positivity will be most important when they kick off their T20I tri-series campaign against India on March 8. PHOTOS: STAR/COLLECTED



Kalabagan break Agrani Bank

SPORTS REPORTER

Tasamul Haque and Mohammad Ashraful hit centuries to propel Kalabagan Krira Chakra to their second win from seven games in the Dhaka Premier League at the BKSP-3 ground in Savar yesterday.

Opener Tasamul struck 106 and Ashraful scored an unbeaten 102, the third century from the disgraced former Bangladesh captain since his return to the domestic circuit after serving a three-year fixing ban, as Kalabagan chased down Agrani Bank's fighting 252 with eight balls to spare and five wickets standing.

The pair added 188 runs for the second wicket before Tasamul departed after hitting a dozen boundaries in his 115-ball knock. Ashraful's unbeaten 136-ball inning contained 10 boundaries. Taibur Rahman finished the chase in style, hitting two massive sixes against pacer Shafiqul Islam in the penultimate over as Kalabagan reached 256 for five in 48.4 overs.

Earlier, the Agrani Bank total was

built around a nervous 99 from opener Shahriar Nafees and a 58 by Azim. The two openers put on 128 runs. But once Nafees was out in the 41st over, leaving the score at 197 for four, the bankers failed to prosper. Left-handed Nafees struck 14 boundaries and a six in his 125-ball knock. It was Agrani Bank's fifth defeat in seven games. Akbar ur Rahman picked up three wickets for 34 runs for Kalabagan.

At the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur, promotes Shinepukur CC pulled off a thrilling last-ball victory against Legends of Rupganj.

Chasing Legends' 268 for three, which was built around Mohammad Naim's 130-ball 93 and Indian Parvez Rasool's blistering 66-ball 88 not out, Shinepukur

needed six runs off the last over with two wickets standing. But number 10 batsman Raihan Uddin hit two boundaries, including a last-ball four after Mohammad Saifuddin was run out off the fifth delivery of Mohammad Shahid while chasing a tight single, to seal Shinepukur's fourth win in seven outings.

However, it was opener Sadman Islam and Indian Uday Kaul who laid the platform for the victory with a 121-run stand for the fourth wicket after they were limping at 62 for 3. Sadman scored a polished 95 off 116 balls studded with eight fours, while left-handed Kaul hit 61 off 70 balls that featured four fours and a six.

At the Khan Shaheb Osman Ali Stadium in Fatullah, Khelaghar

SCORES IN BRIEF

BROTHERS UNION V KHELAGHAR
BROTHERS UNION: 187 all out in 46 overs (Junaid 21, Das 21, Kapali 66, Suhrawardi 33 not out; Mahmud 3-24, Moinul 2-48)
KHELAGHAR SKS: 188 for 7 in 49.3 overs (Sadikur 35, Rafsan 30, Menaria 55, Moinul 22, Mehedi 2-42, Suhrawardi 2-18)
Result: Khelaghar SKS won by 3 wickets.

AGRANI BANK V KALABAGAN

AGRANI BANK CC: 252 for 9 in 50 overs (Azmir 58, Nafees 99, Javed 20; Muktar 2-43, Mahmudul 2-56, Rehman 3-34)

KALABAGAN KC: 256 for 5 in 48.4 overs (Tasamul 106, Ashraful 102 not out; Al-Amin 2-27, Shafiqul 2-47)
Result: Kalabagan KC won by 5 wickets.

LEGENDS OF RUPGANJ V SHINEPUKUR

LEGENDS OF RUPGANJ: 268 for 3 in 50 overs (Mazid 25, Naim 93, Naeem 38, Rasool 88 not out, Shuvagata 1-21)
SHINEPUKUR CC: 272 for 9 in 50 overs (Shadman 95, Kaul 61, Afif 29; Shahid 3-50, Rasool 2-37, Mosharraf 2-44)
Result: Shinepukur CC won by 1 wicket.

SKS beat Brothers Union by three wickets in a low-scoring affair.

Sent in to bat, Brothers were bowled out for 187 in 46 overs with Alok Kapali standing in the ruins with 66 runs which featured six fours and a six. Sohrawardi Shuvo, with 33, was the other notable contributor in the below-par total. Hasan Mahmud with 3 for 24 was the pick of the Khelaghar bowlers.

Khelaghar, in their chase got off to a very slow start with their openers Sadikur Rahman (35) and Rafsan Al Mahmud (30) putting on 67 runs in 17 overs. They suf-

fered a mini-collapse after that and were reduced to 99 for 4 in the 28th over before a 60-run stand for the fifth wicket between Ashok Al Menaria (55) and Moinul Islam (22) guided them close to victory. Indian Menaria struck three fours and a six in his match-winning 77-ball innings. With this win, Khelaghar joined Shinepukur in third position, behind leaders Abahani and second-placed Prime Doleshwar, who have five wins against Abahani's six at the end of the seventh round of the country's List A competition.



TASAMUL... 106



ASHRAFUL... 102 n.o.



SHADMAN... 95

New-look India eye success in SL

AFP, Colombo

India's rising talent will be put to the test in this week's tri-nation Twenty20 series in Sri Lanka in the absence of some established stars.

Rohit Sharma-led India enter the tournament against Sri Lanka and Bangladesh as favourites, but must cope without big-hitters Virat Kohli and Mahendra Singh Dhoni.

Selectors opted to rest the star pair for the short-format series and instead experiment with fresh faces.

Wicketkeeper-batsman Rishabh Pant, who has just two T20 international appearances, and rookie pacer Mohammed Siraj, 23, are being given the opportunity to gain international experience.

Pant, 20, recently smashed the second-fastest T20 century off 32 balls for Delhi against Himachal Pradesh -- just two balls short of Chris Gayle's all-time quickest 100 off 30 balls in the 2013 Indian Premier League (IPL).

And 26-year-old left-arm seamer Jaydev Unadkat, who has already taken seven wickets in six T20 international appearances, made headlines when he was bought for \$1.8 million by the Rajasthan Royals in January -- the highest price paid for an Indian player. India enjoyed one-day international and T20 series wins over South Africa earlier this month, but face a resurgent Sri Lanka in their opener on Tuesday.

Markram delays Aus victory

AFP, Durban



Aiden Markram led a stirring South African fightback but could not prevent Australia from closing in on victory on the fourth day of the first Test at Kingsmead on Sunday.

Opening batsman Markram made 143 but South Africa were hanging on at 293 for nine, still 124 runs short of a target of 417, when bad light stopped play.

South Africa were in desperate trouble at 49 for four but Markram shared stands of 87 with Theunis de Bruyn (36) and 147 with Quinton de Kock (81 not out) which gave South Africa hope that they could pull off a miracle victory.

His dismissal, though, opened the door for Australia to rip through the tail. Mitchell Starc took three wickets in five

balls to have South Africa nine down.

That caused the umpires to tell Australian captain Steve Smith that play could only continue if he used slow bowlers. De Kock and Morne Morkel survived nine overs in ever-deteriorating light against Smith and Nathan Lyon before the umpires took the players off five minutes before the scheduled close.

That South Africa would even entertain faint hopes of victory seemed impossible when their four most senior batsmen were dismissed without reaching double figures.

But Markram, in only his seventh Test, remained calm amid the carnage. The recovery started with a determined partnership for the fifth wicket with De Bruyn, who made a stylish 36 before he was caught behind off Josh Hazlewood. It was the only wicket to fall between lunch and tea.

Markram was joined by De Kock, whose form leading into the Test had been dismal. But the left-handed wicketkeeper looked in good touch from the start and took the fight to the Australians.

It was Markram's third Test century but easily his important innings. He made hundreds against Bangladesh and Zimbabwe, two of cricket's lesser powers, earlier in the season. He showed good composure, a sound technique and some elegant off side drives in a 218-ball innings which included 19 boundaries.

The damage was done before lunch when Dean Elgar, Hashim Amla, AB de Villiers and captain Faf du Plessis all fell cheaply.

Markram and Elgar put on 29 for the first wicket before Elgar edged a sharply lifting delivery from Starc to wicketkeeper Tim Paine to be out for nine.

Amla avoided a pair but only made eight before he was leg before wicket to Hazlewood.

South Africa then suffered a hammer blow when De Villiers, their top scorer in the first innings, was run out for nought.

Markram turned a ball from off-spinner Nathan Lyon behind square leg and did not respond when De Villiers called him through for a run. De Villiers had to turn and tried to go back but could not beat David Warner's throw to Lyon.

Pat Cummins struck with his third ball of the innings when he beat Du Plessis for pace and flattened his off stump.

SCORES IN BRIEF

AUSTRALIA: First innings 351

SOUTH AFRICA: First innings 162

AUSTRALIA: Second innings 227 (Bancroft 53, Warner 28, Smith 38, Marsh 33, Cummins 26; Morkel 3-47, Maharaj 4-102, Rabada 2-28)

SOUTH AFRICA: Second innings 293 for 9 (Markram 143, De Bruyn 36, De Kock 81 not out; Starc 4-74, Hazlewood 2-57)



South Africa opener Aiden Markram acknowledges the applause after reaching his third Test ton on the fourth day of the first Test against Australia in Durban yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

MacLeod blasts Afghans away in opener

STAR SPORT DESK



Afghanistan's dream for a World Cup berth got off to a horrible start when they suffered a massive seven-wicket defeat against Scotland in one of the four opening day fixtures of the 2018 World Cup qualifiers in Zimbabwe yesterday.

It was also a forgettable debut for Rashid Khan as the youngest captain in ODI history. The young leg-spinner, who entered the match as the world's top-ranked T20I and ODI bowler, failed to make an impression as Scotland, chasing Afghanistan's competitive 255 all out in 49.4 overs, walloped their way to 256 for three in 47.2 overs with Calum MacLeod smashing an overpowering unbeaten 157 off 146 balls. The experienced right-hander, who shared 208 runs for the third wicket with Richie Barrington (67), hit 23 fours and a six.

It was a rare off day for Rashid. He scored a duck with the bat and then conceded 68 runs in his nine overs for the wicket of Barrington.

Rashid stepped in to lead Afghanistan in the absence of Asghar Stanikzai, who has been diagnosed with appendicitis. Interestingly, at 19 years and 165 days, Rashid replaced Bangladesh's Rajin Saleh as the youngest captain. Rajin, at 20 years and 297 days, led the Tigers against South Africa in an ICC Champions Trophy game in Birmingham in 2004.

Afghanistan's next Group B game is against hosts Zimbabwe at the same venue tomorrow. The home side recorded a massive 116-run win against Nepal in the other fixture in Bulawayo. In the other two games Ireland beat the Netherlands by 93 runs in D/L method and UAE defeated PNG by 56 runs, also in D/L method at Harare.

SCORES IN BRIEF

AFGHANISTAN: 255 all out in 49.4 overs (Shahzad 30, Nabi 92, Najibullah 67; Wheel 3-36, Sharif 2-46, Berrington 3-42)

SCOTLAND: 256 for 3 in 47.2 overs (MacLeod 157 not out, Barrington 67; Mujeeb 2-47)

Result: Scotland won by 7 wickets.



Calum MacLeod's unbeaten 157 off 146 balls powered Scotland to a seven-wicket victory against Afghanistan in the ICC World Cup qualifiers in Bulawayo yesterday. PHOTO: ICC

Player-of-the-match: Calum MacLeod. ZIMBABWE: 380 for 6 in 50 overs (Zhuwao 41, Mire 52, Taylor 100, Ervine 34, Raza 123; Kami 2-82, Regmi 2-69)

IRELAND: 264 for 8 in 50 overs (Vesawkar 52, Aarif 50, Paudel 30; Vitori 2-46, Raza 3-48)

NETHERLANDS: 149 all out in 32.2 overs (Cooper 19, Ten Doeschate 21, Edwards 26, Van der Gugten 33, Murtagh 3-28, McCarthy 2-28, Rankin 2-19, K'O'Brien 2-28)

Result: Ireland won by 93 runs (D/L method)

UAE: 221 all out in 49.4 overs (Mustafa 95, Ashfaq 50; Nao 2-42, Vanua 4-39)

Result: UAE won by 56 runs (D/L method)

Player-of-the-match: Mohammad Naveed.