



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Excitement overwhelms fears as Games begin

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangabandhu 9th Bangladesh Games finally got underway yesterday after a one-year wait at the Bangabandhu National Stadium amidst the backdrop of promising performances and the threat of Covid-19.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina declared the Games open through virtually from Gono Bhaban and urged athletes and organisers to take measures to protect health safety.

"It is a part of the celebrations for the birth centenary of Bangabandhu, but it was suspended due to coronavirus. Although it came back afresh, I want the Games to be played by taking care of everyone's health," Hasina said in her short speech. "If any nation wants development, it needs to develop every sectors, including sport, which is really

essential because sports are especially vital for children and the younger generation."

SA Games double-gold medallist swimmer Mahfuza Akter Shila and golfer Siddikur Rahman lit the torch of the Games in the opening ceremony, which was mostly comprised of audio-visual displays but that

here was no shortage of enthusiasm, inspiration and eagerness among athletes although they were a bit worried about the spike in Covid-19 infection rates.

"I have been preparing for the Bangladesh Games for more than a year and am eagerly waiting to perform on the big stage," said boxer Mohammad Nasid from Kishorganj, who never participated in any national boxing championships in his playing career although he once participated in the Victory Day Boxing tournament.

Skating coach Asif Iqbal was busy maintaining his players during the march

past. Around 50 players had turned up Dhaka a month ago to undergo training for the Games.

"It is true that we haven't taken enough preparations due to limitations and the lay-off," Iqbal said. "We can't hide the fact that we are feeling anxious due to the current coronavirus situation, but we can't stop everything due to coronavirus. We have been following health guidelines such as wearing masks, sanitising hands and limiting outings."

Mahfuza Akter Shila of Bangladesh Navy believes the Games are going to be a platform for athletes from service teams.

"The athletes of service teams are in good shape because they have trained regularly whereas athletes outside service teams struggled to train amid the pandemic. From that perspective, there is little chance to get new performers outside of services teams in the Games," Shila opined.

Another positive lesson in New Zealand!

MAZHAR UDDIN



Pacer Shoriful Islam dropping a return catch from Finn Allen, who would go on to smash a career-best 29-ball 71 in the third and final T20I in Auckland, was a fourth lifeline for the match-winner, who was dropped twice in the fourth over of yesterday's game.

Bangladesh went to New Zealand focused on getting a first-ever international win in the country against the hosts across any format. But the way Shoriful dropped a rather simple catch will only add to the cause of worries for the team management following batting and bowling debacles that saw them lose three ODIs and as many T20Is.

Head coach Russell Domingo, who tends to not excuse Bangladesh's after poor performances, will perhaps find some positives from the 65-run thrashing in the final game on the tour, which was reduced to 10-overs-a-side due to rain at Eden Park. Among the positives could be that the Tigers

Bangladesh, who have travelled to New Zealand thrice in the past four years, still could not cope with alien conditions although the weather, pitch and outfield remained the same as on previous tours. The promise of bouncy and pacy wickets also remained unchanged as did the performance from the Tigers.

Liton Das will probably want to forget his debut as Bangladesh's T20I skipper after regular captain Mahmudullah Riyad was unable to take part due to injury.

But even the stylish right-hander, who was bowled for a golden duck when he tried to improvise a shot off pacer Tim Southee towards

SHORTEST COMPLETED INNINGS IN T20IS (BY BALLS)

Team	Overs (Balls)	Opposition	Venue
Turkey	8.3 (51)	Czech Republic	Iltfov county, Romania
Turkey	8.5 (53)	Austria	Iltfov county, Romania
Bangladesh	9.3 (57)	New Zealand	Auckland, New Zealand

SCORES IN BRIEF

NEW ZEALAND: 141 for 4 in 10 overs (Guptill 44, Allen 71, Phillips 14, Mitchell run out 11, extras 1; Taksin 1-24, Shoriful 1-21, Mahedi 1-34)
BANGLADESH: 76 all out in 9.3 overs (Naim 19, Soumya 10, Liton 0, Nazmul 8, Afif 8, Musaddek 13, Mahedi 0, Shoriful 6, Taskin 5, Rubel 3 not out 3, Nasum 3, extra 1; Southee 3-15, Milne 1-24, Ferguson 1-13, Astle 4-13, Phillips 1-11-1)
Result: New Zealand won by 65 runs.
Player-of-the-match: Finn Allen.

were unable to bat out the entire 10 overs as they folded for 76 in 9.3 overs after the hosts posted 141 for 4. Domingo could like the positive intent from batsmen in chasing the target and blindly attempting to charge bowlers despite losing wickets in every single over of their innings.

With a defeat in the third and final T20I, Bangladesh concluded a disastrous month-long sojourn, which saw whitewash defeats in both the ODI and T20I series.

fine leg, brought out his trump card and said they were still learning.

"We are not playing good cricket in regards to batting and fielding. That is what cost us. We play in sub-continental tracks but here we need to think about how to play teams like New Zealand on bouncy tracks. We are learning; learning about the wicket and conditions and how to play here," the 26-year-old said after the defeat yesterday.

Surprisingly, despite having so many positives from an educational tour of New Zealand, Mahmudullah expressed disappointment, saying there was hardly anything to take from a side being bowled out for 76.

"We couldn't play our best cricket throughout the series. We even arrived in New Zealand with some time on our hands and prepared accordingly. We had a good camp in Queenstown and the boys worked really hard. But that was not reflected on the field," Mahmudullah said.

Probably, performing on the field matters the most!



North Macedonia players go berserk celebrating their memorable 2-1 victory over Germany in the World Cup Qualifier on Wednesday. PHOTO: TWITTER

'Rude awakening for the German team'

AGENCIES

Germany's performance was dubbed "embarrassing" after they suffered their first World Cup qualifying defeat for 20 years in a humiliating 2-1 home loss to North Macedonia on Wednesday which heaped pressure on coach Joachim Loew.

"The disappointment is huge," said a crest-fallen Loew after the final whistle in Duisburg on Wednesday. "This is a set-back. There were a lot of mistakes and we didn't find a way to break down the deep-standing North Macedonians.

"We also let them counter-attack and had

"What can I tell you? I can't, out of emotion, out of happiness. We made the North Macedonians proud and happy. This is like winning the European Championship."

IGOR ANGELOVSKI, NORTH MACEDONIA COACH

for the German team."

Loew was forced back to the drawing board to find quick fixes ahead of this year's European Championship after his team's shock home defeat.

Loew, who is stepping down after 15 years in charge at the end of the Euro 2020 tournament which starts in June, had imagined his last six months in charge

Germany, before being stunned by North Macedonia, had won 18 World Cup qualifiers in a row and were unbeaten in 35 since losing 5-1 to England in 2001.

differently.

Instead his team suffered only their third ever World Cup qualifying home loss, and the first since a 5-1 thrashing by England in 2001, after beating Iceland and scraping a win over Romania in their first two group games last week.

The defeat by North Macedonia, ranked 65th in the world, came only months after Germany's 6-0 thrashing by Spain, and will only pile more pressure on Loew.

Germany are third in Group J and level on six points with second-placed North Macedonia but behind leaders Armenia who have nine points. Only the group winners qualify automatically.

"We will review everything," said the coach. "We have to keep working. We have to find our consistency."

no grip on the game. "Napoli midfielder Eljif Elmas scored the winner five minutes from time after Ilkay Gundogan's penalty had drawn Germany level following 37-year-old striker Goran Pandev's first-half opener.

The German press were quick to put the boot in. "How embarrassing!" fumed daily Bild on their website. "Nasty Surprise" said football magazine Kicker while Frankfurt-based daily FAZ opted for "Rude awakening

Rangpur get first win ahead of indefinite postponement

SPORTS REPORTER



Rangpur Division got their first win in the Bangladesh National Cricket

League (BNCL), defeating defending champions Khulna by seven wickets in a Tier 1 clash on the final day of the second round yesterday, before news broke that the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) had decided to suspend the tournament indefinitely due to the upsurge in Covid-19 cases.

"We have decided to suspend the league for now as a safety measure. We will observe the Covid-19 situation before thinking of starting the league again," BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury told The Daily Star today.

At the Rangpur Cricket Garden, the hosts chased down a small target of 117. With 101 needed on the final day, an in-form Nasir

Ramos suffers calf injury

REUTERS, MADRID

Real Madrid captain Sergio Ramos has sustained a calf injury, the club said in a statement on Thursday.

Ramos was an 86th minute substitute in Spain's 3-1 win over Kosovo in a World Cup qualifier on Wednesday and said he picked up the injury in the post-game warm down.

The problem puts his participation in Tuesday's Champions League quarter-final first leg at home to Liverpool and the Clasico with visitors Barcelona on April 10 in serious doubt. The club did not say how long the problem will keep him sidelined but media reports suggest it will be up to a month.

SCORES IN BRIEF

TIER 1
Khulna v Rangpur
Khulna: First innings 221 and Second innings 259 all-out in 69.3 overs (Amit 89, Ziaur 64; Mukidul 6-67, Mahmudul 2-24)
Rangpur: First innings 364 and Second innings 120-3 in 33.3 overs (Nasir 48 not out, Jahid 37; Halim 2-31)
Result: Rangpur won by seven wickets.

Hossain guided his side to the target for the loss of three wickets.

After scoring fifty in the first innings, he continued his good run with the bat and remained unbeaten on 48 while opener Jahid Javed added 37 to seal an easy win after Rangpur pacer Mukidul Islam's 12-wicket haul lay the foundation.

Mukidul bagged six wickets as Rangpur took the first-INCLnings

TIER 2
Chattogram v Dhaka Metropolis
Chattogram: First innings 402 for 8 declared and Second innings 234 for 6 declare in 48 overs (Mahmudul 78, Sadikur 47; Sharifullah 2-94)
Dhaka Metropolis: First innings 267 and 148 for 2 in 50 overs (Zahiduzzaman 61 not out, Azmir 47; Mehedi 1-39)
Result: Match drawn.

lead by bundling Khulna out for 221 in their first innings after posting 364 and Mukidul came back with another six wickets in the second innings to claim a maiden ten-wicket haul in first-class cricket.

The other Tier 1 game between Sylhet and Dhaka Division ended in a draw at the outer ground of the Sheikh Kamal International Cricket Stadium in Cox's Bazar.

Resuming on 183 for six in their second innings, Sylhet were bowled out for 219 but Asadulla Al Galib top-scored with 82 as they posted a huge target of 310.

In reply, Dhaka ended on 147 for five at the stumps, with Saif Hasan scoring a team-high 64 runs. Dhaka sit on top of the Tier 1 table with a win and a draw from two rounds of matches.

The Tier 2 game between Chattogram and Dhaka Metropolis also ended in a draw at the main ground of the Sheikh Kamal International Cricket Stadium in Cox's Bazar.

Chattogram declared their second innings on 234 for six to set a massive 370-run target after young Mahmudul Hasan Joy scored a team-high 78.

In reply, Dhaka Metropolis reached 148 for two at stumps to remain top of the Tier 2 table.

SA begin march on 2023 World Cup

AFP, JOHANNESBURG



South Africa return to one-day international cricket for the first time in a year against Pakistan today with a history-making new captain at the helm and their sights set on the 2023 World Cup.

The Proteas have not played an ODI since completing a 3-0 home series win against Australia in March 2020. Following that series, South Africa went to India but the tour was aborted because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

A planned series against England last December was then postponed after two members of the touring party tested positive for coronavirus - results which later were declared as false positives.

As a result, South Africa have yet to secure their first points in the World Cup Super League which decides which seven teams join hosts India as automatic qualifiers for the 2023 World Cup.

The Proteas and the Netherlands are the only teams who have yet to play a match in the 13-team league. Seven teams already have three or more wins, so South Africa, under new captain Temba Bavuma, will be seeking to make up ground when they play Pakistan at SuperSport Park in Centurion on Friday in the first of three one-day internationals.

South Africa will be at full strength for the first two matches but will be without five leading players for the third match because of Indian Premier League commitments.



Temba Bavuma