



B'desh golfer takes early lead

SIDDIKUR LEADS THE PACK WITH 5-UNDER PAR; BHULLAR TOP INDIAN AT TIED FIFTH PLACE



Siddikur Rahman of Bangladesh tees off from the 10th hole on Day 1

Ajit Bebaruah | TNN

Ahmedabad: Md Siddikur Rahman of Bangladesh landed at the Kensville Golf and Country Club three days in advance to study the course with his country mate Jamal Hossain Mollah and his caddy Raju Sharma. After the early practice rounds on Monday Siddikur said that "it is a challenging" course. But that didn't prevent him from taking an early two-stroke lead with a 5-under par 67 at the end of the first round of the Gujarat Kensville Challenge 2011 here on Thursday.

Siddikur, who is ranked 7th in the Asian Tour Order of Merit and with an Asian Tour title (Brunei Open) under his belt and who was also declared the Bangladesh player of the year in 2010, had five birdies in the 11th,



TOP INDIAN: Gaganjeet Bhullar

12th, 14th, 16th and 6th holes starting from the back nine. This Kurmitola Golf Club member who started off as a caddy before rising further through the club's junior development programme turned pro in 2007. And today he played like a true pro right from the start and was hitting the long and short ball well and also putted beautifully to move into sole lead. "I started off well. I was hitting the long and short ball well and I was also putting beautifully. It was a perfect day," said Siddikur after the day's play, who had double birdies in the par-3 11th hole and par-4 12th hole after starting on the 10th. In fact he sank the longest putt at 20ft in the 12th hole.

Ricardo Santos of Portugal, Florian Praegant of Austria and Daniel Denison of England were tied second at 3-under 69.

The highest ranked Indian in

the leader-board is Gaganjeet Bhullar who is tied fifth with 2-under par 70. Espen Kofstad of Norway who started the day with 4-under par after the 6th hole slipped to tied fifth with 2-under par 70. Mads Vibe-Hastrup of Denmark and Klas Eriksson of Sweden were also tied fifth with 2-under par score of 70.

Wednesday's pro-am winner Jorge Campillo of Spain, Bjorn Akesson of Sweden, Manav Jaini of India and Ross Bain of Scotland were tied ninth with 1-under 71.

Bhullar who was trailing at the start recovered in time to be among the top five golfers at the end of the day's play. As he later said, a change in his putter was one of the reasons why he took time to get his act together.

"I was driving the ball well but I had changed my putter recently, which I am using it for the first time in this tournament, and so took some time to get used to it," said Bhullar.

"I was in the US recently for practice where I changed my putter. There was nothing wrong in my earlier putter but the feel of the new one is even better. It just took some time to get used to it," said Bhullar, who had birdies in the 3rd, 10th and 11th hole, and looked to make amends on the second day. But he added: "A lot depends on the wind too. Because the course is long and tough and the wind will definitely be a factor during the rest of the tournament."

Siddikur on the other hand is looking to play with the course and "keep the rhythm going" as play progresses into the second day of the tournament. The top 60 golfers will make the cut for the final rounds on Saturday and Sunday.

LEADERBOARD:

1. Md Siddikur Rahman (BAN) 67; T-2 Ricardo Santos (POR) 69; Florian Praegant (AUT) 69; Daniel Denison (ENG) 69; T-5 Gaganjeet Bhullar (IND) 70; Espen Kofstad (NOR) 70; Mads Vibe-Hastrup (DEN) 70; Klas Eriksson (SWE) 70; T-9 Jorge Campillo (ESP) 71; Bjorn Akesson (SWE) 71; Manav Jaini (IND) 71; Ross Bain (SCO) 71.