

## Cruciani warns against complacency

### Bangladesh begin title defence against lowly Bhutan today

AL MUSABBIR SADI from Karachi

Bangladesh launch their Fourth SAFF Championship campaign against rank-outsiders Bhutan at the People's Sports Complex Stadium here today. The Group B opener kicks off at 4.15pm Bangladesh time, which will be followed by the India-Nepal clash. Bangladesh won their previous three meetings against the tiny mountain kingdom but coach Diego Andres Cruciani warned against any complacency ahead of his first

full international as Bangladesh coach.

The Argentine, who took over as national coach a couple of months ago, told reporters yesterday that starting a tournament against a weak team was always good but he was taking nothing for granted.

"For a coach, no team is an easy opponent. Many times small teams have upset big names. I don't care what people say about Bangladesh beating Bhutan by a big margin, I am too much serious about the match," the 41-year-old told Argentine at the Gymkhana ground during Bangladesh's first training session in Karachi.

"I won't mind if the boys score

many goals because goal-difference may play a big role in the end."

Cruciani has finalised his first eleven and he has given veteran Alfaz the job to play as the 'free midfielder' for his experience and current form.

"I had Ujjal in mind when I started training but Alfaz has impressed me. He is intelligent and has the experience to strike at any moment as well as passing the ball timely. He can play in any position and he is likely to come out any time."

"I need more efficiency from the

two forwards. They miss too many chances but I want them to find the target more."

"The defenders are very good but sometimes they show lack of sense without the ball. When my team attacks, they tend to follow the ball and forget the job to mark the opponent striker. We have to be watchful about counter attacks," added Cruciani.

When asked about Joy's knee injury, Cruciani said that he was satisfied with the physician's work on the Bangladesh captain.

However, Cruciani's biggest complaint was his lack of knowledge about his opponents.

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## The Indian Mr. Cooler

SPORTS REPORTER from Karachi

Master strategist PK Bannerjee said he is just not the manager of the Indian football team but also plays the vital role of peace-maker between the players and coach.

"I have to guide the team and the coach too," said a jovial Bannerjee during India's training session at the Gymkhana ground on Wednesday.

"Our coach (Syed Nayeemuddin) is a strict disciplinarian. Sometimes, it gets on the players' nerves. So I am going to play the role of Mr. Cooler."

"There are many young players in the side and they must be handled carefully. I am going to bridge the gap between the coach and the players," said the former India international who has coached the Indian team often.

"The coach has made sure that everyone's hair is cut short, and even a veteran like me feel that I have a crew-cut before going to Nayeem. But I hardly have any hair left to do that."

"Yes, sometimes he gets this hard but I have to pacify things like this," he added.

He also said that Baichung Bhutia was fit to play although media reports claimed the Indian star footballer and captain is out of shape.

"He has had some problems

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WHAT ARE YOU THINKING OF? Bangladesh coach Diego Cruciani looks at something else as he charges train at the Karachi Gymkhana ground on Wednesday.

## Samabesh edge past Town Club

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, City

Samabesh Club of Munshiganj came from behind to register a 3-2 victory over Khulna Town Club in the Nitol-Tata fifth National Football League at the Cox's Bazar Stadium yesterday.

Masum, Ripon Khan and Monir Hossain struck one each for the winners while Nazmul Hasan and Jumratul Islam netted one goal each for the losers.

The outcome pushed Samabesh tally to four points to join Bangladesh Army while Brothers Union are leading the Group-A table with five points.

Samabesh, who held Brothers Union to a goalless draw in Rangpur, trailed the first half 1-2 but bounced back in the second half to leave the field with smiling faces.

Masum put Samabesh ahead after three minutes with a sudden long-range shot that found the opponent net flying over the custodian Mithu's head.

Two minutes later Nazmul Hasan restored the parity for the Town Club with an angular shot.

Town Club took a 2-1 lead in the 15th minute with a header of Jumratul.

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## Bangladesh in final

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

An unbeaten 75 by skipper Mushfiqur Rahim enabled Bangladesh maintain their winning run in the under-19 tri-nation tournament when the hosts handed Sri Lanka a massive 102-run defeat at BKSP in Savar yesterday.

With their fourth consecutive win Bangladesh also confirmed their place in the final. On the other hand, despite the defeat Sri Lanka were also almost certain to play the December 14 final as they already have defeated England, the third side in the meet, twice.

After deciding to bat, Bangladesh thrived on two half-centuries by Shamsur Rahman and Test cap Rahim to put up a challenging total of 253-6 in 50 overs.

Two local centurions of the tournament Tamim Iqbal and Raqibul Hasan gave Bangladesh a flying start as the opening pair added 63 runs in 8.5 overs.

But after the dismissal of Raqibul (23 off 28 balls), the home team experienced a little hiccup as they lost two more wickets for one run.

Left-handed Tamim smashed 34 off 24 balls that featured six bound-

aries.

Shamsur Rahman, who was playing his first match of the tournament, repaired the damages featuring in a 56-run fourth wicket stand with Mehrab Hossain (21). The right-hander contributed 59 off 88 balls with four hits to the fence.

Number six Rahim struck five fours and one six in his 69-ball knock.

Weerasinghe was the most successful Sri Lanka bowler with 3-39.

In reply, Sri Lanka lost wickets at regular intervals to be bundled out for 151 in 41.1 overs with opener Soyya making the team highest 46.

New ball bowler Kamrul Islam claimed three wickets for 40 while super-sub spinner Nabil Samad and Suhrawardi Shuvo captured two wickets each for the home team.

Meanwhile, umpire Shawkatur Rahman made a mockery with the power-play during the second innings as he confused twice with wrong calls.

**SCORES IN BRIEF**  
**BANGLADESH UNDER-19:** 253-6 in 50 overs (Tamim 34, Raqibul 23, Shamsur 59, Sakib 1, Mehrab 21, Mushfiqur 75 not out, Sohrawardi)

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## Greg befriends Sourav

Cricket

AFP, Chennai

India's cricket coach Greg Chappell on Wednesday drew the curtain on the unsavoury row with Sourav Ganguly, saying the spat was history.

"We have moved on. The drama that surrounded the episode was much greater than actually was the case," Chappell said in an interview after the drawn first Test against Sri Lanka here.

Chappell and Ganguly clashed in September when the coach slammed the country's most successful captain as being "unfit to lead the side" in a leaked e-mail to Indian cricket chiefs.

A truce was brokered between the two but Ganguly was replaced as captain by Rahul Dravid and also sacked from the one-day side for matches against Sri Lanka and South Africa.

The left-hander won a narrow 3-2 verdict by the selectors to remain in

the Test squad, but lasted just 24 deliveries in the rain-ravaged Chennai Test where he ran out Venkatsai Laxman before being

dismissed for five.

Ganguly goes into the second Test starting in New Delhi on Venkatsai Laxman before being

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FOES NO MORE! India coach Greg Chappell chats with former captain Sourav Ganguly during a practice session in Chennai on November 30.

## Bhutan's eyes on SA Games

SPORTS REPORTER from Karachi

Bhutan make their second appearance in SAFF Championship not with high hopes but to prepare well for next year's SA Games in Sri Lanka, said chief coach Khare Bahadur Basnet yesterday.

Basnet, also an official of the South Asian Football Federation (SAFF), took over from their Korean coach to train a very young side and believed that they had improved.

"I can't give much time because of my involvement with our federation and the SAFF. So assistant coach Zigma Singye is in real charge," said Basnet on the eve of their match against Bangladesh.

"Actually, it is our Under-23 team with a couple of senior guys. Our target is the SA Games. Also, we are in a very tough group with India, Bangladesh and Nepal. Frankly speaking, they are much better sides," said the former Bhutan international who played for Dhaka Mohammedan in 1980 and for Mohun Bagan in Kolkata in 1982.

"Bangladeshi players have more

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GOT HIM: Chittagong players celebrate the dismissal of Dhaka batsman Sazzad Kadir during the fourth day's play at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium on Wednesday.

## Improbable Dhaka draw

ISPAHANI MIRZAPORE TEA 7th National Cricket League

SPORTS REPORTER

The experience of Khaled Mahmud and the youthful exuberance of Mahmudullah Riyad combined to lift Dhaka from the brink of defeat to an exciting draw against Chittagong on the final day of their four-day National Cricket League match at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium yesterday.

Dhaka looked dead and buried when they lost seven wickets for 121 before Tea chasing an improbable victory target of 351. But Mahmud and Riyad denied Chittagong by putting up 128 runs for the eighth wicket as the holders eventually finished on 267-8. The

spectacular rearguard action also helped Dhaka to avoid their first defeat after two outright victories on home ground.

Chittagong might be disappointed after coming so close to beating the star-studded Dhaka but they still won four points by virtue of their first innings lead. Chittagong now closely followed Dhaka in the six-team table with 10 points. Dhaka have 14 points after the end of the third round of the country's lone first-class competition.

Draw was also the order of the other two fixtures in Khulna and Bogra. But hosts Khulna and Sylhet both won four points each for having first-innings advantages over Barisal and Rajshahi respectively to join Chittagong in the crowded second position. The National League will now take a long break before the fourth round starts on

January 17. Cricketers however will have to quickly shift their focus to the Premier Division Cricket League that begins on December 12.

**DHAKA-CHITTAGONG**

When Mahmud joined Riyad Dhaka were left with an entire session to survive with only three wickets in hand.

It was a demanding task but the pair rose to the occasion to script a great escape act in the short history of the National League.

When most of the experienced Dhaka batsmen including captain Mohammad Ashraful (36 off 29 balls) perished playing reckless shots, young Riyad, batting at number six, set the perfect example how to cling to the crease.

The right-hander showing nerves of steel never resorted to any fancy shot during his match-saving 122-

ball 70 that featured seven boundaries. Riyad, a matured head on a young shoulder, also scored a vital 63 in the first innings.

Mahmud, the more aggressive of the two batsmen, followed up his first-inning 81 with an unbeaten 83 that contained eleven fours and two sixes.

With the duo playing with ease a frustrated Chittagong captain Nafees Iqbal offered an early draw with nine overs remaining but Dhaka decided to play so that either of the two batsmen might reach 100.

But Riyad was out after two overs, driving occasional medium pacer Masumuddin straight to Nafees at short cover.

Mohammad Sharif then safely

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## Symonds savages Kiwis

### Australia take series with nail-biting win

Cricket

AFP, Wellington

Australia's Andrew Symonds blasted a brilliant 156 to seal the one-day series against New Zealand Wednesday as the hosts' courageous run-chase fell just two short in a thrilling climax.

Australia recovered from a shaky start to post an imposing 322-5 but New Zealand chased to the very end, falling only in the final over when they lost two wickets and could score only three of the six runs needed to win.

Captain Ricky Ponting said Symonds' innings, the third highest one-day total by an Australian and the biggest ever compiled against New Zealand, was "unbelievable".

"You won't see many better than that, you probably won't see any better than that at all," he said.

Symonds and Test reject Michael Clarke (82 not out) came together for a partnership of 220, the highest ever fifth-wicket partnership for Australia against New Zealand and one which appeared certain to put

the match beyond the hosts' reach.

But New Zealand put itself in the box seat in the second last over of the match, scoring 18 runs off Brett Lee, including two boundaries, two no-balls and a wide.

The direct hit by Clarke to run out McCallum was "sensational", Ponting said.

"That was the turning point of the game really," he said.

Australia's debutant bowler Mick Lewis kept his composure in the last over, conceding only three runs and running out Mills to finish off the New Zealand challenge. He finished a day to remember with the best Australian figures of 3-56.

After a watchful start, Symonds smashed 12 fours and eight sixes from 127 balls.

He hit two straight sixes off Kyle Mills in the 47th over and another three off consecutive balls from Chris Cairns in the next, crashing 56 runs off his last 18 balls against a demoralised Kiwi attack.

Cairns had good reason to rue putting Symonds down off the

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ANDREW SYMONDS...156

## Solanki ready for Akhtar

Cricket

CRICINFO/PTI, undated

Vikram Solanki, the England opener, says he is looking forward to facing Shoaib Akhtar when the five-match one-day leg of England's tour to Pakistan gets underway on Saturday.

Solanki, one-day cricket's first super-sub, and Shoaib were teammates at Worcestershire this past season, and Solanki had the opportunity to witness the fast bowler up close.

"Shoaib is a very interesting character -- quite a unique type of guy," Solanki told BBC Sport. "Changing from 90 miles an hour to slower deliveries was quite impressive. He has exceptional talent."

Shoaib's short appearance for Worcestershire was marred by controversy after John Elliott, the club chairman, criticised his attitude, stating: "It's all about team spirit and getting the dressing-room right and when you've got a bloke like Shoaib in there, it can cause

mayhem."

Solanki referred to Elliott's comments as "unfortunate", adding that "Shoaib has obviously worked very hard on his fitness and bowled exceptionally well in the Tests."

Shoaib was a revelation in the three-Test series against England, bagging 17 wickets, many of which came at crucial moments. His batting was also a marked improvement over past displays, a fact praised by the media and the Pakistan team management.

Solanki, who wasn't part of England's squad for the Test series in Pakistan, believed he had a good chance of adding to his 41 one-day appearances. "I am just pleased to be here -- it's fantastic to be part of the squad," he said. "Obviously, I'd like to play a full part and make best use of the opportunity."

His last appearance in English colours was an unbeaten 53 from the number eight spot against Australia at The Oval during the 2005 summer.

However, Shoaib has set his sights on other opponents.

The 'Rawalpindi Express'

Wednesday said that his team's victory over England in the Test series had set up the prospects of an interesting contest against India who visit the country early next year.

"Our victory sets up the prospects of one hell of a series (against India) because the pundits had more or less written us off for the series against England."

"But the team proved the critics wrong and instead earned praise and appreciation for a thoroughly professional performance that has to be attributed to a combined team effort," Shoaib said.

Pakistan took the first Test in Multan by 22 runs after conceding a first innings lead of 144 and then wrapped up the series at Lahore where they won by an innings and 100 runs.

India tour Pakistan to play three Tests and five one-day internationals between January 6 and February 20.

Akhtar said the England series had provided an excellent opportunity to Pakistan to assess their preparations for the series against India.



## Did U Know?

WG Grace became the first player to record 1,000 runs and 100 wickets in a season in 1873.



**ESPN**  
Football Crazy  
Live at 5:00 pm  
Sportscentre  
Live at 8:30 pm



**Romario**  
(Brazilian soccer legend)  
"A lot of critics said I should have stopped playing several years ago but I'm going to carry on playing and, hopefully, well. I hope to play for another year."