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Indian opener Gautam Gambhir cuts one down to third-man as his illustrious partner-in-crime Virender Sehwag (L) looks on during their 155-run partnership in the second ODI of the Kityly Cup against Pakistan at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

## 'All about starts'

BISHWAJIT ROY



India skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni finally appeared in front of the media after his side pulled off a massive 140-run victory over their perennial rivals Pakistan in the second match of the Kityly Cup at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

Beginning with their toss win, everything went in favour of Dhoni's side to carry on their momentum of first-ever one-day triumph in Australia and as well as put end to their traditional rival's 12-match winning streak.

"It was all about a good start in both batting and bowling which made the difference. It was important to score against the new ball and our openers did exactly what we needed. Our two new-ball bowlers also gave us an ideal start to secure the comfortable victory," said Dhoni at the post-match briefing.

Everyone was looking at a mouthwatering clash looming but it ultimately turned into a one-sided affair as the Pakistan bowling, without their two frontline bowlers Shoaib Akhtar and Mohammad Asif, was not good enough to stop India's run spree.

Pakistan hardly had any answer in reply to their opponent's 330 and it was new ball bowler Praveen Kumar whose early strikes ensured Pakistan's meek surrender for 190

runs in 35.4 overs.

Both captains however admitted that batting was not so easy in this surface as the game progressed, as the ball was coming late and it kept low.

"It was a very good opening not because of the boundaries rather for their excellent running between the wickets. It was fantastic the way they scored runs against the new-ball bowlers. If we lost too many early wickets our run-rate definitely would have come down and the wicket was not easy as ball came slowly to the bat," explained Dhoni reflecting on the 155-run opening partnership between Virender Sehwag and Gautam Gambhir.

"We had a bad day because we did not bowl well and then lost too many early wickets in the chase of a big target. And you know, it was not an easy task to score as the game progressed," said Pakistan skipper Shoaib Malik.

Shoaib however said that it could have been a different story if Gambhir had not been dropped twice by Younus Khan when the left-hander was on 4 and 29.

"It could have been a different story if we did not drop those two catches. On the other hand you must make a flying start when we chase this kind of a total but we lost early wickets. We are now looking forward to the final," said Malik.

On the other hand, Dhoni was satisfied with his young side's hard work in the match.

"It was nice to see the way our

young players gave more than hundred per cent in the field. It does not matter whether the players are senior or junior rather the issue is whether they are hungry to perform and maintains utmost fitness," said a confident-looking Dhoni.

The Indian skipper was also excited at the way his players responded in the 50-over game after six weeks of Twenty20 cricket in the Indian Premier League (IPL).

Dhoni was hoping for a pleasant finish in the tournament ahead of the Asia Cup in Pakistan this month.

"I hope it would be a pleasant tournament for us if rain ultimately does not bother us," he said.

### SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard of the Kityly Cup triangular one-day series match between India and Pakistan at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur on Tuesday:

INDIA	
Gambhir c Akmal b Riaz	62
Sehwag c Akmal b Riaz	89
Yuvraj b Gul	55
Y Pathan c Iftikhar b Afridi	3
Sharma b Afridi	9
Dhoni lbw b Tanvir	24
Raina c Misbah b Gul	26
I Pathan c Malik b Gul	18
Kumar not out	6
Chawla not out	0
Extras: (b-5, lb-4, nb-9, w-20)	38
Total: (For eight wickets in 50 overs)	330
Did not bat: Sharma	
Fall of wickets: 1-155, 2-174, 3-199,	

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## Where is the craze?

SPORTS REPORTER

Back in May 2000, India played Pakistan in the Asia Cup at the Bangabandhu National Stadium. The bowl was not only packed but several hundred fans waited outside the stadium for a ticket and be a part of the frenzy.

The cricket-mad people in the country became as desperate as they could to make their presence felt at the ground during all six previous encounters between the two perennial foes because everyone felt proud of watching an India-Pakistan war on the cricket field.

Many believed it as a lifetime's achievement to share the experience with the others.

The traditional rivals once again locked horns in the city yesterday after seven years, though at a different venue at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur. But now a days the scenario has totally changed.

The craze in and out side the stadium was not as much as one could think even five years back.

The first evidence was that the big bowl was not jam-packed rather it was half-full. Has then the emotion vanished among the cricket lovers in the country?

If you take the explanation from any of the new generation, then you surely will believe that this generation is not as much emotional as their predecessors were with the match between India and Pakistan.

"I came here because I am free today. I would not mind if I missed the game. I think you guys are stuck with the emotion of India-Pakistan craze still. But we think in a different way as first of all we have our own team to support and we also support other teams like Australia and South Africa," was the explanation from Shafayet, a college student residing in Mohammadpur in the city.

One of his friends however had different view. He believes that the absence of superstars like Sachin Tendulkar and Shoaib Akhtar and the emergence of the Indian Premier League phenomena play a major part in the lack of enthusiasm.

Former national opener turned commentator Athar Ali Khan was

surprised by the response.

"We all were actually talking about the poor turn up because after a long gap, India and Pakistan are playing here. The absence of mega stars may be one of the reasons behind the poor turn up. But it is also true that these generation thinks in a different way, but let me tell you that I have seen people get crazy for a ticket of this match a decade ago," said former opener Athar.

Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB), which has considered the tournament as a big financial boost, however was satisfied with the turn up of more than 20,000 spectators in the big bowl as they believed that there were a number of reasons behind the issue.

"I think crowd is okay if you consider all the things. But I must say the craze was not same as it was a few years back with the India-Pakistan match. I think the uncertain weather condition, examination in schools and colleges and the late night finish discouraged most of the fans," said Ahmed Sajjadul Alam, BCB's media committee chairman and organising secretary of the tri-series.

## Pak embassy to handle Asif case

CRICINFO, undated

Mohammad Asif's fate remains in the balance with Nadeem Akram, the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) official handling the case, set to return home from Dubai where the fast bowler has been detained since June 1 for the possession of an illegal substance.

Akram said an official from the Pakistan embassy in Abu Dhabi will handle the case and was optimistic about Asif's release.

"I am returning home tonight, but I am hopeful of an early release (for Asif)," Akram told PTI yesterday. Though Asif's lawyers are continuing to pursue the case, Akram said there was no word from the Dubai Attorney General or the public prosecutor's office on whether to press charges against Asif for deport him.

Asif had appeared before the chief prosecutor on June 5, where he made his statement. He had appeared before the court two days later, following which the public prosecutor's findings were referred to the Attorney General. The PCB yesterday quashed rumours that the Pakistan government had gotten involved with the case.

## Villa vanquishes Russia

INTERNET, undated



David Villa fired a terrific hat-trick as Spain opened their Euro 2008 campaign with an eye-catching 4-1 triumph over Russia in Group D.

Luis Aragones, who had the luxury of leaving Cesc Fabregas on the bench, watched on as his men carved the Russians open on countless occasions via some exemplary pass-and-move football.

Villa, currently contracted to Valencia, broke the deadlock on 20 minutes, tapping into an empty net after excellent work from Fernando Torres down the left channel.

Just before the break, Spain doubled their lead as Villa latched onto Andres Iniesta's perfectly-timed through-ball to slip an effort under goalkeeper Igor Akinfeev.

Aragones' side took their foot off the gas in the early stages of the second half, but they soon upped their game with Villa completing an impressive hat-trick, bamboozling his marker to roll home in the 75th minute.

And while Roman Pavlyuchenko netted a late consolation for battling Russia with four minutes remaining, the night was Spain's to savour as Fabregas capped a marvellous evening with a diving header from close range.

Villa, whose position in the starting line-up was the cause of some debate in the build-up to the event, gave the Russian defence an early suggestion it could be a long evening when he had the first chance of the game.

A pinpoint cross-field pass from Sergio Ramos found Villa unmarked on the edge of the area, but after showing good chest control, the 26-year-old, under pressure from Aleksandr Anikoukov, sliced his left-footed shot wide with

only goalkeeper Igor Akinfeev to beat.

Russia created their first decent opening soon after when Anikoukov got in behind Spain full-back Joan Capdevila on the left, but his cross into the centre was drilled well by Igor Semshov, who will have felt he should have done better.

Spain then took the lead with a goal from nothing. Torres picked up possession after a Russia move had broken down and the Liverpool man, having raced goalwards got a lucky break of the ball against marker Denis Kolodin, before he unselfishly passed inside to Villa to slot into an empty net after Akinfeev had come out to meet Torres.

That was a blow for the Russians, who had not scored against Spain in their three previous meetings, but Guus Hiddink's men came within inches of an immediate riposte in the 22nd minute when Konstantin Zyryanov hit the woodwork.

A low cross from Diniyar Bilyaletdinov eluded a host of players as it skidded across the area before Zyryanov sent in a shot that rebounded back off the right-hand post with Iker Casillas well beaten.

Pavlichenko also struck the Spain crossbar with a dipping volley later in the first half, but it would not have counted as referee Konrad Plautz had spotted a foul by the Spartak Moscow man.

Aside from those two efforts, it was still Spain who were running the match and Akinfeev was proving much the busier of the goalkeepers and he was called into action to palm away shots from Torres and Villa.

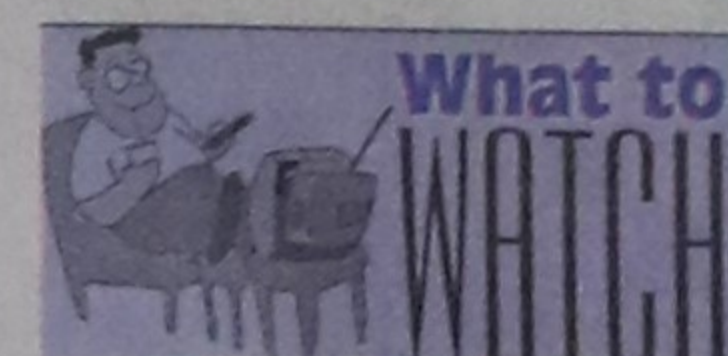
The Russia goalkeeper could do nothing to prevent Villa making it 2-0 in the 45th minute though, when Andres Iniesta's slide-rule pass put the Spain number seven in on goal and he coolly finished under the diving Akinfeev.

The Russians started the second

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**Lukas Podolski**  
(Polish-born German forward)  
"I have two hearts -- a German one and a Polish one!"

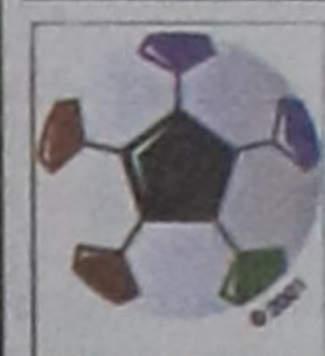


**ESPN**  
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Czech Republic v Portugal  
Live from 10:00pm  
Switzerland v Turkey  
Live from 12:45am (Thursday)

**STAR Sports**  
SAFF Championship SEMIFINALS  
India v Bhutan  
Live from 5:00pm  
Sri Lanka v Maldives  
Live from 8:00pm

## It can't get any worse

AL MUSABBIR SADI



Flashback April 3, 2006: Bangladesh-Guam 3:0.

It happens to be Bangladesh national football team's last victory in an international. How long do we have to wait for the next win since beating world football's nobody

Guam in the inaugural AFC Challenge Cup match at home?

Not that we had the chance to put an end to this 26-month long lean patch but unimpressive shows against not-so-fancied Hong Kong, Cambodia, Afghanistan, Bhutan and Sri Lanka led to failure.

Whose failure? It remains the biggest question to be answered.

While South Asia's weakest team Bhutan play defending champions India in one of the two semi-finals of the fifth SAFF Championship this afternoon, Male (co-hosts Sri Lanka and Maldives play in other semi in the evening in Colombo), Bangladesh return home empty handed today from a winless campaign that takes the nation's football history to its lowest ebb.

The inaugural SAFF Championship in 1997 in Kathmandu saw Bangladesh bow out without a win and not making the semis but reaching the next three finals and winning in 2003 had established them as the second best team in South Asia behind India.

That doesn't count anymore. Making coach Abu Yusuf the scapegoat would be the easiest way to shrug off responsibility for the

newly elected Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) executive body, which has taken charge for just over a month, but the root of the failure lies in some members of the incumbent committee who handled the national team poorly during the tenure of the last committee.

They simply did not care. They also did not prepare the team for their most important football tournament properly.

In a face-saving move, the BFF had appointed Syed Nayeemuddin last year but as soon as the SAFF was put back a few months, the football officials suddenly found the India coach -- who led his home side to win the 2005 SAFF Championship in Pakistan with a 2-0 victory over Bangladesh in the final -- expensive.

Nayeemuddin was sacked in October 2007 after four Nehru Cup matches in India, where his side even failed to beat lowly Cambodia, and the World Cup pre-qualifying fixtures against Tajikistan, who drew 1-1 in Dhaka and triumphed 5-0 in Dushanbe.

Football-less ness continued and the BFF woke up just two months before the SAFF, naming Abu Yusuf the coach.

To get out-of-action footballers in shape in such a short time for international standard itself is a challenging job and Yusuf made it difficult by picking up a very young and experienced side -- some of the players had not even played for top-level clubs in domestic football -- for the AFC Challenge Cup qualifiers and the SAFF.

Without any homework on the opposition, Yusuf's boys left for Central Asia and got the first shock

when they survived a close call in a goalless draw against Afghanistan in the opening match of the Challenge Cup qualifiers.

Afghanistan did better by beating the hosts to reach the tournament proper while Bangladesh returned with a defeat to Kyrgyzstan, conceding two goals in the last seven minutes.

Although a highly ambitious Yusuf repeatedly claimed his side have the capability to play throughout the 90 minutes of a game in the same pace, no one was convinced. Without a playmaker or even a holding midfielder in the side, the team's young backline failed to cope with opposition pressure.

Perhaps he was building a team for future, ignoring the seniors over suspect fitness.

Under pressure, the former national defender picked up two senior players but even in the last group match, where Bangladesh needed to beat hosts Sri Lanka to reach the semifinals after frustrating draws against Bhutan (1-1) and Afghanistan (2-2), he ignored last season's top centre-back Nazrul. Besides Nazrul, Joy was also recalled and the midfielder, who got just 15 days to prepare for the event, proved in the first two matches that experience and skill do count.

Yusuf's nod rather went to Ariful, who deflected a harmless-looking shot into their own post to kill all hopes of Bangladesh against Sri Lanka. Not that Ariful is a bad player but he was responsible for conceding two goals against Syria and one against India in last year's Nehru Cup. He should have been given more time to mature for this level.

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VIVA LA VILLA: Spanish striker David Villa is ecstatic after netting the second of his three goals during their 4-1 rout of Russia in the Euro 2008 match at Innsbruck yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP