

SAFF C'ship from Dec 4

Salahuddin favourite for hot seat

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

The 6th SAFF Championship will be held in Dhaka from December 4 to 14, SAFF general secretary Sirajul Islam Bachchu disclosed at the BFF House yesterday.

"The championship was initially slotted for December 2-12, but with the consent from the member countries we have deferred it by two days because of the Eid-ul-Azha [the second highest religious festival of Muslim community]," said Bachchu at a crowded press briefing where BFF president Kazi Salahuddin was also present.

Salahuddin was actually the man behind bringing the biggest football festival of this region to Bangladesh for the second time after India relinquished its right host the meet following visa complications. The Indian government has stopped issuing visas to any Pakistan player, also a part of the eight-nation meet, following the Mumbai terrorist attack last year.

"Bangladesh is lucky to host the SAFF Champion-

ship for the second time," said the SAFF general secretary, adding that the draw ceremony will take place on Saturday. Bangladesh won a two-way battle against Nepal to host the meet and Salahuddin is set to take the SAFF presidency on Saturday when the third SAFF congress takes place at Hotel Sheraton after the draw ceremony.

A dynamic Salahuddin is the popular choice to take

the hot seat from All Nepal Football Federation president Ganesh Thapa, who has been criticized for being inactive since taking over the SAFF presidency in 2001.

"We promised to keep football in the field for 10 months in a year. We are now in a situation to believe that we can do it. And I just want to say that the awarding of the championship is other SAFF nation of our wholehearted

effort," said Salahuddin. "Now it our responsibility to make the championship a success so that in future we can ask the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) that we are capable of hosting even bigger international tournaments."

Salahuddin also said that Bangladesh would be playing for the top position though the result in the last meet was not good.

"Our target is to become number one though we finished seventh out of eight nations in the last meet. However, the players of the national team, who had practiced off-season under the head coach, looked quite fit and have been playing better in the ongoing Federation Cup so we can expect a good result from them in the SAFF Championship," said Salahuddin.

BFF senior vice president Salam Murshedi, vice presidents Sawkat Ali Khan Jahangir, Kazi Nabil Ahmed, general secretary Al Musabbir Sadi, members Harunur Rashid, Golam Rabbani Helal and Shafiqul Islam were among others present.



A smiling Kazi Salahuddin (2nd from R), the president of Bangladesh Football Federation, takes questions from the media during a press conference at the BFF House yesterday.



Abahani's Ghanaian striker Awudu Ibrahim (L) vies for the ball during their Federation Cup tie against Chittagong Abahani at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

FIRST SEMIFINAL; AUSTRALIA V ENGLAND

Old foes to fight it out

CRICINFO, Centurion



It's battle rejoined. Just in case there hadn't been enough of England facing Australia in recent months, the semifinal of the Champions Trophy has thrown together a rematch. There shouldn't be much these two sides don't know about each other, but the intrigue of this meeting is that it's a straight knockout. Most expected Australia to be here, but few imagined England would still be in the tournament.

For a while it looked as though Australia would blow their chance of progressing as the batting came to a screeching halt in their chase against

Pakistan. However, Brett Lee and Nathan Hauritz did just enough -- Australia were through when they levelled scores off the penultimate ball -- and another meeting with the old enemy was an added bonus.

Australia will bring with them memories of the 6-1 win in the recent one-day series, while England will say that result doesn't matter anymore. "We thrashed them the last time we played them," said Graeme Swann, England's team joker. The truth, as is often the case, lies somewhere in the middle. Australia clearly have the upper hand in recent contests, but England's resurgence since arriving in South Africa means they have a good chance of extracting revenge.

England may secretly be relieved that Australia scrambled the final bye, which

meant they wouldn't have to face Pakistan's mixture of spin and reverse swing on a slow, wearing Centurion pitch. Not that Australia's attack will be easy, but at least there won't be any of the unknown. In fact, it's just the opposite. The teams probably know each other a little too well at the moment.

England have concerns over Stuart Broad, who has a torn buttock muscle. He went for a scan and appeared in discomfort while the team trained in Centurion. If he misses out it will probably mean a recall for Graham Onions, but the loss of Broad's batting could allow Adil Rashid into the mix, especially given the spin-friendly conditions. Rashid may come into the permutations anyway as a replacement

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NSC approves 09-10 budget

SPORTS REPORTER

The National Sports Council (NSC) yesterday approved a budget of 73.39 crore for the 2009-10 fiscal with an allocation of only four crore taka for the training and talent hunt programme.

The country's sports regulatory body in a meeting also approved a revised budget of 57.12 lakh for the 2008-2009 fiscal with State Minister for Youth and Sports and NSC chairman Ahad Ali Sarker in the chair.

A NSC statement, however, said there would be no surplus in the current budget as they would spend all the money in the fiscal.

Out of the four crore taka, as many as three crore will be spent for training purpose while the rest will be used for the talent hunt.

Besides, Tk 1.76 crore have been allotted for 32 national federations and associations.

Nat'l tennis from Saturday

SPORTS REPORTER

The Anlene National Tennis Tournament gets underway on Saturday at the National Tennis Complex in Ramna with over 200 participants including 20 women taking part.

The officials of the Bangladesh Tennis Federation disclosed it yesterday at a press conference. Amol Roy and Sathi Sarker have been rated top seeds in the men's and women's singles for the tournament, which also will hold four more events -- men's doubles, women's doubles, boy's singles and veteran's doubles.

Sponsor New Zealand Dairy Products Bangladesh Limited will provide Tk 3 lakh

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Sky Blues back on track

SPORTS REPORTER



Two second-half goals from striking duo Mohammad Robin and Ghanaian Awudu Ibrahim took giants Abahani to the quarterfinals of the Citycell Federation Cup with a 2-0 win over Chittagong Abahani Limited in a Group C encounter at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Nine-man Muktiyoddha Sangsad handed a 1-0 defeat to Bangladesh Police to keep their hopes of qualifying for the last eight, thanks to a first-half strike from Saifur Rahman Moni.

The second consecutive victory put Abahani on top of Group C with maximum six points. They are two points ahead of Muktiyoddha Sangsad, who now need a draw against Dhaka Abahani on Monday to see them in the knockout phase as Chittagong Abahani are on one point and have a match in hand against winless Bangladesh Police.

After having recorded an unimpressive 1-0 win over Bangladesh Police in their first appearance, Abahani coach Amalesh Sen brought three changes in his starting eleven with striker Robin replacing Enamul Haq and Arif Khan Joy taking the position of midfielder Zahed Parvez Chowdhury while right-back Obidur Rahman was replaced by Atiqur

Rahman Mishu.

The changes made a huge pressure on the territory of the port city outfit in the first 15 minutes though there was no fruitful attack and the Dhamondi-based, Abahani, gradually lost the procession of the midfield and Chittagong Abahani went into the attack with Nigerian midfielder Nech Francis hitting the crossbar.

Then Mithun Chowdhury being set up by the Nigerian recruit, failed to beat Abahani goalkeeper Biplob Bhattacharya in a one-on-one situation.

After surviving from two close calls, coach Amalesh then sent Zahed Parvez in place of Motiur Munna and Abahani again started to regain the midfield.

Mehdi Hasan Ujjal came close to opening the score four minutes from time when he got Chittagong goalkeeper Khaled Azam into better position before lashing a shot lamely to squander an easy sitter.

After resumption, debutant Shahedul Alam replaced Arif Khan Joy and Abahani took full control of the midfield and went ahead 12 minutes into the second half when Robin was presented a free ball from Ibrahim and the former Mohammedan striker tapped the ball home from close to celebrate his Abahani debut.

Chittagong Abahani, however, once again

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What's Even

Federation Cup Football
Brothers Union v Feni Soccer Club (3:00pm)
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium
Mohammedan v BKSP (5:00pm)
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium

What to Watch

ESPN
ICC Champions Trophy
Australia v England
First Semifinal
Live from 7:15pm

MU, Real come out on top

Milan fall to humbling loss

INTERNET, undated



Manchester United came from a goal down at home to beat VfL Wolfsburg 2-1 Wednesday in the Champions League, while Real Madrid continued their strong start to the season with a comfortable win against 10-man Marseille.

Ryan Giggs and Michael Carrick were the heroes for United while World Footballer of the Year Cristiano Ronaldo netted a brace for Real in their 3-0 win, the club's seventh in succession.

In other action, a Nicolas Anelka goal was enough to maintain Chelsea's perfect start to the group phase, but AC Milan were stunned at home by Swiss side FC Zurich.

United struggled for long periods against Wolfsburg in their Group B encounter at Old Trafford and had to make an early change when England international Michael Owen went off

injured in front of national manager Fabio Capello to be replaced by Dimitar Berbatov.

The substitution added more fluency to a stuttering United first-half performance with the Bulgarian putting Carrick clear in front of goal, but the midfielder's effort was well saved by Diego Benaglio in the Wolfsburg goal.

The German champions almost took the lead themselves immediately after the restart, but Ricardo Costa blasted over, while Anderson's firmly struck shot on 54 minutes was well turned away by Benaglio.

Wolfsburg found themselves in front shortly afterward, when Edin Dzeko rose above Patrice Evra to head a Makoto Hasebe cross past Tomasz Kuszczak.

Wolfsburg's lead lasted just three minutes until a Giggs free-kick took a wicked deflection past Benaglio.

United pushed on relentlessly in search of a winner, and Carrick eventually made it 2-1 for the home side 12 minutes from time with a curling shot from the edge of the area.

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Gazi Tank active on final day

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

Gazi Tank Cricketers sealed the show on the concluding day of the three-day inter-club players' transfer when they signed up a few star cricketers including top four ICL returnees as well as national pool players to challenge the perennial dominance of Abahani and Mohammedan.

Gazi roped in a total of 11 players including Shahriar Nafees, Alok Kapali, Nazimuddin and Forhad Reza,

who are all set to return to the mainstream after their one-year exile for the ICC non-approved Indian Cricket League.

National pacer Nazmul Hossain, all-rounder Raihan Anas and wicketkeeper Nadimuddin Mintu were the notable cricketers who joined the club on the final day at Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak, Suhrwardi Shuvo and pacer Ziaur Rahman had earlier completed the registration in the special transfer window for the Bangladesh A team.

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Sub-junior badminton starts today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

The Kool National Junior and Sub-Junior Badminton Championships 2009 shuttles off at the Gymnasium of the Pabna Stadium today.

The event, arranged to scout budding talents from across the country, will feature 122 shuttlers from 19 districts, four divisions and an education board.

Square Toiletries limited is sponsoring the six-day meet that will conclude on October 6.

"Badminton is one of the

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True colours!

CRICINFO, Centurion



In the last ten or so overs in Centurion was found the very essence of Pakistan and Australia as cricket nations, and their beauty. It is why people love one country and so respect and fear the other. That another nation could have benefited from this almighty slugfest adds to the value of this ICC Champions Trophy.

There is not a country in the world that can pull off, even precipitate, the kind of crazy that Pakistan did here, let alone with the regularity that Pakistan does it. It is unique and it is theirs to unveil when they see fit. They have done it across the ages, in most countries, in all conditions, against all opposition and it is a thrill unlike others. Usually it happens at least likely moments when the game is drifting.

Wednesday, Australia was toughing it out, chasing a small total, but there was a sense, even if a fleeting one, that a wicket might just do something. It was there today and it has been there on many such occasions, in Multan in 2005 against England, through the 1992 series against the same opponent, very often against New Zealand, also in South Africa in the early-to-mid

90s. Even when Ricky Ponting and Michael Hussey were grinding along, so well were Pakistan bowling and so sluggish was the track that one wicket was going to make it, just one.

So Ponting then fell to an outstanding catch in the deep, which is often how these things emerge, to take on a life of their own. It happened during the 1992-93 Hamilton Test where an Asif Mujtaba reflex-stunner at short leg lit up the mother of all disintegrations. It happened against the same opponents just a few months back, on neutral territory, where Shahid Afridi's catch turned the match on its head, as well as the tournament itself. Sometimes it is a run-out.

And then everything changes. Fielders become panthers, more alert; bowlers sharpen their eyes and hone in on the length, and batsmen panic, as if they have suddenly discovered that the person lying down next to them for years is in fact someone else entirely. Navedul Hasan bowled two maidens in a row during the death overs (and gave just one the over before), having already beaten Hussey with a yorker so good, even he didn't see it hit the stumps. Mohammad Asif, just back from hell, snuck out a two-wicket over; Umar Gul came back to bowl the last over of the game cold, having not

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Wolfsburg forward Edin Dzeko (R) heads in the opening goal past Manchester United goalkeeper Tomasz Kuszczak (2nd from L) during their Champions League match at Old Trafford on Wednesday.