

# The hour arrives for Bangladesh

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh will be hoping to put a month of turmoil behind them when they step onto the Bangabandhu National Stadium today in pursuit of the SAFF Championships.

The departure of Brazilian coach Edson Silva Dido, followed by his explosive comments against certain quarters at the BFF has had some effect on the preparation of interim coach Shahidur Rahman Shantoo, whose first act was to name a squad that missed many of the youth brigade that Dido had drafted.

All of this has only added to the pressure as Bangladesh seek a repeat of 2003 by lifting the trophy on home soil.

Though Shantoo did not admit to feeling any pressure on the verge of the first game, he looked uneasy sharing his strategy, formation and starting eleven against Bhutan, a team who are ranked a pitiful 196th and have never beaten Bangladesh. However they did hold Bangladesh in their last meeting during the fifth SAFF championship.

"We will play for full three points as there is no alternative but to win and I don't want to recall anything that happened against Bhutan in the past," said Shantoo.

The 2003 champions Bangladesh would like to forget the nightmare of SAFF Championship in Colombo last year where they were held 1-1 by Bhutan, 2-2 by Afghanistan before being beaten 1-0 by Sri Lanka in the group stage matches.

Shantoo studied that Bangladesh-Bhutan match and found some errors and tried to rectify those problems during his 19-day training camp. The former Bangladesh international also believes that familiar environment and home crowd will play a key role in the match against Bhutan.

"There was some misunderstanding as well as a lack of combination amongst the players, the offence and the defence. I did a lot of work on it and after talking to the boys it seems to me that the boys are in a good mood and are fully ready to take the challenge this time," said the former Bangladesh goalkeeper.

The Bangladesh coach, however, might face problem in selecting his starting eleven even though Shantoo believes all his players are equal and capable of playing anywhere on the field.

"The starting eleven is yet to be finalised and both the playing eleven as well as the game strategy will be finalised tomorrow (Friday) morning," Shantoo said.

"It will have no impact on the boys as they know what I want from them."

Captain Aminul Haq was more upbeat than his coach and thought they have already overcome their lack of combination in the three practice matches.

"Yes, there was a lack of combination in the first practice

match against Sheikh Russel, but we have overcome it after the matches against BFF XI and Ulsan Hyundai," Aminul said.

"The coach worked a lot on the match situations as well as control of the ball at the camp and I think there will be no problem against Bhutan."

"Our target is to play the final match. So we are not only thinking about Bhutan, we are also thinking of winning all group matches and if we can play accordingly, then it is possible to win all five matches including the final," added Bangladesh goalkeeper Aminul.

Bangladesh are also getting the inspiration from their success in the AFC Challenge Cup qualifiers at home under the guidance

of Dido.

"Almost all players have been under the national fold after the AFC Challenge Cup and a good understanding have been built up among us and I think success in the AFC Cup qualifiers will boost us morally," said Aminul, adding that they would miss the services of injured winger Zahid Hossain, the key instrument of Bangladesh's wins against Cambodia and Macao.

However, the Bangladesh captain has pinned his hopes on playmaker Mamunul Islam along with star striker Zahid Hasan Emily, who is in a rich vein of form in the domestic competition having struck six goals in the Federation Cup and the Bangladesh League.

Shantoo's counterpart, Bhutan coach Koji Gytoku also

thought that Bangladesh are ahead of them in terms of tactics as well as technique.

"Maybe Bangladesh are better than us considering their tactics and techniques, but at the same time, sometimes surprises are produced," said Gytoku adding that his side will adopt a defensive mood in a bid to snatch a point and hopefully get something on the break.

Bhutan captain Prema said, "Our target is to win the game against Bangladesh though Bangladesh will play with home field advantage."

Sri Lanka take on Pakistan in the day's first match which will kick off the proceedings.



WHO WILL LIFT THE TROPHY COME DECEMBER 13? Captains of the eight participating nations stand with the SAFF Championship Trophy at Sonargaon Hotel yesterday, on the eve of the regional football carnival that kicks off at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today.

PHOTO: STAR

## KNOW THE CONTENDERS

A brief synopsis of each side taking part in the 6th SAFF Championship in Dhaka between 4th to 13th December, 2009 is provided below. Since none of the teams are traditional heavyweights or frequent visitors to Bangladesh, this is a guide to help identify each team's players and status from a global standpoint. It will highlight each team's full squad list, their FIFA rankings, past performance in the Championships, their aspirations for this year's tournament and their best player.

### GROUP A

Team: Maldives

FIFA Ranking: 148

Squad: Mohamed Sifan, Abdul Ghani, Umair Mohamed, Ibrahim Soba, Jameel Mohamed, Mossa Ahmed Eiraz, Hussain Mohamed, Sinan Mohamed, Fazeel Ibrahim, Ashfaq Ali, Ali Ashadh, Gasim Shamweel, Abdul Ghani Akram, Naseer Mukhtar, Umar Ali, Rasheed Ahmed, Ahmed Thoriq, Arif Mohamed, Imran Mohamed, Ahmed Aghfan.

Coach: Urbanyi Istvan Bela

Last tournament: Champions

Star turn: Ashfaq Ali

Aspiration: Maldives are a strong compact side and have earned the tag as one of the upstarts from the region. They will look to dominate from the off and go all the way

Team: India

FIFA Ranking: 135

Squad: Nirmal Chetri, Rowilson Rodrigues, Ravinder Singh, Baideep Singh, Jagpreet Singh, Thakchom Naoba

Singh, Balwant Singh, Sushil Kumar Singh, Joaquim Santan Abranches, Je Je Lalpekdua, Khangembam Jibon Singh, Dharmeraj Ravanam, Manish Mathani, Jagtar Singh, Robert Lalthianmuena, Denzil Michael Franco, Subodh Kumar, Laxmikant Kattimani, Jewel Raja Shaikh and Subhash Singh Singam.

Coach: Shukvinder Singh

Last tournament: Runners-up

Star turn: Sushil Kumar Singh

Aspiration: Despite fielding a largely second string side, the Indians will pose stiff opposition for any side. Expect them to ruffle a few feathers but they perhaps lack the experience to go all the way.

Jo Maku Rai, Nirajan Malla, Rabin Shrestha, Anjan K.O., Bijay Gurung, Bikash Malla, Biraj Maharian, Rohit Chand, Yogesh Shrestha, Nirajan Khadka, Raju Tamang, Ritesh Thapa, Chon Bahadur Thapa, Sagar Thapa, Santosh Shahukhala, Anil Gurung and Mulmi Maheswor.

Coach: Krishna Thapa.

Last tournament: Group Stage

Star turn: Rakesh Shrestha

Aspiration: Nepal are targeting a semifinal spot this time around, after a group stage exit in the last tournament. They will look to get a solid start in their opening match against Maldives.

### GROUP B

Team: Bangladesh

FIFA Ranking: 165

Squad: Aminul Haq, Biplob Bhattacharya, Mazharul Islam Himel, Rajani Kanta Barman, Ariful Islam, Wali Faisal, Ibnul Siraji, Mamun Mia, Nasiruddin, Atiqur Rahman Mishu, Mehdi Hasan Ujjal, Arman Aziz, Zahed Parves Chowdhury, Pranotosh Kumar, Shahedul Alam, Mamunul Islam, Abdul Baten Komol, Enamul Haq, Mithun Chowdhury and Zahid Hasan Emily.

Coach: Shahidur Rahman Shantoo.

Last tournament: Group stage

Star turn: Zahid Hasan Emily

Aspiration: Despite the acrimonious sacking of Brazilian coach Dido, Shahidur Rahman Shantoo's charges will look to use home advantage to win the whole tournament

Team: Sri Lanka

FIFA Ranking: 158

Squad: Mohamed Illadeen, Thilina Suranda, Bandara, Chathura Gunarathna, Asmeer, Channa, Sanjeev, Ajith Kumara, Steinwall, Sembukutti Kankanange Lahiru Tharaka, Anurudda Bandara Warakagoda.

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### BTV

Bangabandhu SAFF Championship

Sri Lanka v Pakistan

Live from 4:00pm

Bangladesh v Bhutan

Live from 7:00pm

### ESPN & SuperSport3

2010 FIFA WC Draw

Live from 11:50pm

Neo Cricket & SuperSport2

India v Sri Lanka

Third Test, Day 3

Live from 11:00am

### TEN Sports

New Zealand v Pakistan

Second Test, Day 2

Live from 6:00am

South Africa v England

Fifth ODI

Live from 7:30pm

### STAR Cricket

Australia v West Indies

Second Test, Day 1

Live from 7:00am



### Bangabandhu SAFF Championship

Sri Lanka v Pakistan (4:00pm)

Bangladesh v Bhutan (7:00pm)

Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium

### Premier Div Cricket League

Abahani v Mohammedan

Venue: Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium

Surjo Torun v Kalabagan

Venue: Fatullah Cricket Stadium

Biman v Khelaghar

Venue: BKSP-2

## Ispahani comes in as sponsors

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Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) finally got a sponsor for the ongoing Premier Division Cricket League in the middle of the competition as MM Ispahani came forward to sponsor the country's most coveted domestic tournament.

Ispahani earned the event sponsorship rights by paying Tk 25 lakhs and they will also provide extra money of Tk 3 lakhs as prize money for all 15 Super League matches. The deal was done after completion of the ninth round of the competition.

Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolitan (CCDM) arranged a press conference yesterday at a local hotel to declare the sponsor's name where the BCB high-ups painted a pale picture regarding catching the sponsor for the domestic competition.

The question was raised whether BCB could properly brand the cricket, the most popular game in the country, to get the real market value as the amount they got hardly reflected that. Aziz Al Kaiser Tito, the chairman of the BCB's marketing committee, however defended their position while expressing their helplessness about getting sponsor for the domestic competition but he said that things would be changed soon. BCB's senior vice-president Mahbul Anam also echoed the sentiment.

CCDM chairman GS Hasan Tamim informed that private satellite channel ETV will telecast live the remaining

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### PREVIOUS WINNERS

Years	Champions	Runners-up	Venue
2008	Maldives	India	Sri Lanka/Maldives
2005	India	Bangladesh	Pakistan
2003	Bangladesh	Maldives	Bangladesh
1999	India	Bangladesh	India
1997	India	Maldives	Nepal



PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh will need the striking pair of Zahid Hasan Emily (R) and Enamul Haq to fire when they launch their SAFF Championship campaign against Bhutan at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today.

## League back with a bang

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After a long Eid vacation the Premier Division Cricket League resumes today with the highly anticipated clash between Abahani and Mohammedan at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

It's not only a prestige battle for the country's two old foes but also vital for the league race as a win will defi-

nately take Mohammedan one step forward towards regaining the title. For holders Abahani it is an opportunity to bounce back into the race after their lone defeat against Biman.

Both sides already added more spice to their star-studded squad by bringing in two Pakistani internationals as all-rounder Abdul Razzaq signed for Abahani and will now encounter his compatriot Rana Navedul Hasan who joined Mohammedan to strengthen the league leaders' pace attack.

"This is second time I came

here to play in the domestic competition after playing for Beximco in the corporate league. I am very much positive and glad to be here. We have a very good team. To me performance is important no matter where I am playing. I don't feel any pressure because the club standard is low for any international cricketer," said Razzaq, the 29-year old all-rounder who has played 46 Tests and 237 ODIs.

How does it feel to play with the world's number one all-rounder (Shakib Al Hasan) in the one-day rankings? The

experienced all-rounder seemed not too happy with the question he was asked after the training at the Dhanmondi Cricket Stadium. "I am here to play and I have to teach the players if I find any weakness during the matches," was the reply of Razzaq.

Rana Navedul Hasan however was not ready to give too much focus with his inclusion in the team. "They (Mohammedan) played nine games and won all before my arrival. I hope it will be a good game tomorrow. And there is an

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## Rain spoils U-19 match at Dambulla

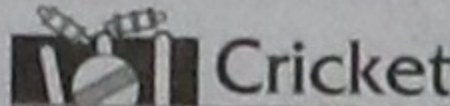
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Bangladesh Under-19 team's return-leg clash in the tri-nation series against Pakistani Under-19s was abandoned without a ball being bowled due to rain at Dambulla yesterday.

Bangladesh's excellent pre World Cup form was snapped in the tournament as they lost both of their first-leg matches against Pakistani Under-19s and Sri Lanka Under-19s.

Bangladesh will play their last league match against Sri Lanka on December 6.

## Sehwag 284 not out



AFP, Mumbai

Virender Sehwag smashed a scintillating unbeaten double century as India turned the tables on Sri Lanka in the third and final cricket Test on Thursday.

Sehwag made 284 not out to lift the hosts to 443-1 by stumps on the second day at the Brabourne Stadium in reply to Sri Lanka's first innings total of 393.

The Delhi opener has so far hit 40 boundaries and seven

sixes in his 239-ball innings, his sixth knock of 200 or more, two of which were converted into triple hundreds.

If he makes 16 more runs on Friday to reach 300, Sehwag will become the first batsman in history to score three triple-centuries. Australian legend Don Bradman and West Indian great Brian Lara have two each.

Sehwag made light of the bounce and turn on the Brabourne stadium to share two double-century partnerships during the run-riot, cheered by 15,000 boisterous home fans.

He put on 221 for the first wicket with Murali Vijay (87) and 222 for the unbroken second with Rahul Dravid, whose share in the partnership was 62.

Vijay, playing the Test only because Gautam Gambhir was unavailable due to his sister's wedding, matched his partner's audacious strokeplay with 10 boundaries and a six.

Vijay became Sri Lanka's lone success of the day when he was trapped leg-before by left-arm spinner Rangana Herath before tea when he

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