

# Hosts look to history

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh will be looking for a repeat of 2003 when the hosts take on India in the second semifinal of the Bangabandhu sixth SAFF Championship at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today.

On way to lifting their maiden title of the regional football extravaganza, Bangladesh had beaten India 1-0 in the semis to reach the final of the third SAFF Championship at the same ground in 2003. And the same rivals, India, are yet again the opponents in the same stage when the hosts are desperately looking for the regionally coveted title for the second time.

However, this time Bangladesh will face an Indian side, mostly comprised of Under-23 players who also lack preparation for the championship.

For the hosts, unlike 2003, there is no inspirational playmaker in Arman Mia, a midfield dynamo in Motiur Munna, or a sharp striking duo like Alfaz Ahmed and Rokonzaman Khanan.

This time, it is team spirit that is spurring the players on to get success in the penultimate hurdle.

"After the win against Sri Lanka, the morale of the players is very high and they are now a unit, even the players of the reserve bench are cheering them up tremendously," Bangladesh coach Shahidur Rahman Shantoo said. "This sort of unity creates team's spirit, which is now the key to our success."

The Bangladesh coach prefers regards the Indian side as challengers rather than thinking of them as a second-string squad.

"It is no matter who is coming to play against us in the semis. The important thing is the match and our target is to win the match to go through to the final," said Shantoo adding that he had found out some weak points of India and would try to attack those areas.

HEAD TO HEAD				
Country	Match	Win	Loss	Draw
Bangladesh	22	3	11	8
India	22	11	3	8



Bangladesh captain Aminul Haque is also upbeat about the match and wants to overcome their second phase to go into the third phase the final.

"We all are ready and committed to win the match. We have already achieved our first part of qualifying for the semis and all are now concentrating on getting past the second part of the semifinal and we are hoping to play the third part, the final, accordingly," said Haque.

Aminul, however, was a bit worried over his team's consistency in the meet.

"We have proved the ability we have against Sri Lanka in our last match, but we have a problem of consistency what we failed to put up against Pakistan after a good start against Bhutan. We, however, talked to each other regarding this and it seems to me that we all will be able to carry our previous match's consistency into the semifinal," said the goalkeeper, who was also a part of Bangladesh's 2003 title triumph.

Nevertheless, Bangladesh will be relying on striking duo Zahid Hasan

Emily and Enamul Haq, who found the back of the opponents net twice each against Bhutan and Sri Lanka to top the lists of scorers.

"Who doesn't want to score in every match? As a striker I am no exception and I will try my best," said Enamul, who had earlier declared that he would like to be the top scorer of the tournament.

On the other hand, India coach Sukhvinder Singh believes that the correct game plan will play a key role in deciding the match though the home side will be enjoying the advantage of familiar environment and crowd.

"Facing the hosts we are not under pressure as all teams are equal, but you can't ignore the home advantage and home crowd as the situation is not similar to our home. I think the game plan will play a role in deciding the match," said Singh, whose side rested six players against Maldives in their last group match.

Singh's main concern is that he is likely to miss the services of midfielders Jagpreet Singh and Manish Maathani.

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(Clockwise from Top) Bangladesh captain Aminul Haque (L) shakes hands with his Indian counterpart Sushil Singh at the Sonargaon hotel yesterday, on the eve of their mouth watering second semifinal of the SAFF Championship at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today. India's master tactician Sukhvinder Singh makes a point to his young charges during a training session at the Abahani ground. Bangladesh's leading marksman Enamul Haque (sitting) stretches as coach Shahidur Rahman Shanto (on his left) looks on during the morning practice at the BUET ground.

## Battle of islanders

SPORTS REPORTER

Reigning champions Maldives and Sri Lanka will renew their rivalry when they face each other in the first semifinal of the Bangabandhu SAFF Championship at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today.

The two neighbouring islanders have been rivals since 1992, with each side contributing to the others development over the last two decades. Hence, they take any match between themselves quite seriously.

"Tomorrow's (Friday) game will be different and unique one as most of the players from both the neighbouring countries know each others very well because many Sri Lankan players are playing the league in Maldives," said Maldives' Hungarian coach Urbany Istavan Bela at the pre-match briefing yesterday.

The Hungarian coach thinks that Sri Lanka might have a better chance in the match, but he is confident to repeat the feat as his boys got the momentum after having played three tough games in five days.

"They might have a better chance because some of their players were rested in their previous match and they are all set to get fresh legs, who got break for at least 24 hours," Bela said. "Of course, I am confident to make my boys ready for getting maximum from them and hopefully we can lift the crown again."

On way to emerging champions in the last edition, co-hosts Maldives ousted Sri Lanka 1-0 in the semifinal on Sri Lankan soil before handing a lone-goal defeat to India in the final.

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HEAD TO HEAD				
Country	Match	Win	Loss	Draw
Maldives	14	5	2	7
Sri Lanka	14	2	5	7



Ashfaq Ali (C) will be the key for Maldives success in the semifinal against Sri Lanka today.

## GP appears alone

SPORTS REPORTER

Country's leading cellular operators Grameenphone is likely to retain the bragging rights of the Bangladesh cricket team after their sole appearance in a tender bid that closed yesterday.

Although the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) was lukewarm about providing the details of the offered price, it was learnt that Grameenphone's financial package was less than the floor price the board set for a two-year term.

"We have received only one offer from Grameenphone. At the moment we are not in a position to disclose the details. We have asked the lone bidder to come up with a revised offer so that we could be convinced to the extent of not thinking of a re-tender," said BCB's marketing committee chairman Aziz AlKaiser.

The board set a floor price of Taka 12 crore for the title sponsorship rights of the national team. But it was learnt that Grameenphone, SEE PAGE 18 COL 4

## Kalabagan down Biman

SPORTS REPORTER

Kalabagan skipped past Biman in the Super League race as they comfortably beat the national flag carriers by 7 wickets in their Premier Division Cricket League encounter at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday. On a day of curtailed matches, title-rivals Mohammedan and Abahani got easy wins as well they defeated Cricket Coaching School and Victoria respectively.

It was a 27-over match per side at the Sher-e-Bangla as the first bites of cold were felt across the country and fog engulfed the stadium and around Dhaka till midday. When they got down

to business, Kalabagan posted a decent score on the board as they put on 201 runs losing eight wickets in their allotted 27 overs. Opener Nazmus Sadat top-scored with 56 off 49 balls while skipper Raquibul Hasan scored 41. Biman pacer Shafiqul Islam was the most successful with 3 wickets for 35. Kalabagan might have thought that this was a good enough score considering the average scores of the season so far. But the Biman batsmen had other ideas. They dictated the terms right from the start as their two openers scored more than run-a-ball to stay well in touch with the required rate. Indian recruit Avishek Mitra got run out after scoring a 31-ball 42, but Mushfiqur Rahim, at the other end, played a match-winning

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## Kiwis bank on Vettori

### Third Test starts today

INTERNET, undated

Daniel Vettori's responsibilities have increased after it was agreed he would bat at No.6 in Friday's third and final Test against Pakistan in Napier.

The decision was made to accommodate an extra bowler on what Vettori has described as a pitch "quite different" from the ones used on previous occasions at the venue.

"I just had a brief discussion with Mark Greatbatch, we've got our heads round it,"

Vettori said.

"I'll be batting at No.6, and we'll play the extra bowler in this time."

We're tossing it up between going with four seamers, or three seamers and two spinners. Vettori has batted at No.6 in ODIs and the promotion comes at the time when the batting line-up is in dire need of some solidity, following failures in both innings in the second Test in Wellington.

"I'm excited about it in some ways and a little nervous as well," Vettori said about his new role.

"When you bat at No.6, your expectations are different and I suppose I have to take a mindset

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## Barca, Inter advance

AFP, Paris



Holders Barcelona and Inter Milan secured their places in the Champions League knock out stages at the last throw of the dice on Wednesday.

Joining this pair on the final batch of group games were Stuttgart and Olympiakos to complete the 16-team cast-list for the second round starting in February.

Barca had the luxury of travelling to Dynamo Kiev knowing that even a defeat would not necessarily spell a premature end to their pursuit of a fourth European crown.

In the end they won 2-1 with goals coming from Xavi and European Footballer of the year Lionel Messi to top Group F.

Inter faced a must-win game at home to Russia's Rubin Kazan, and duly completed the mission with former Barcelona star Samuel Eto'o producing the opener

in their 2-0 win.

That sealed Inter the runners-up spot and potentially shored up Jose Mourinho's position as manager with rumours before kick-off that he could be out at the end of the season if Inter didn't go through.

Mourinho downplayed the pre-match speculation about his job saying: "No-one at Inter has said anything to me, not before the game and not after it."

Elsewhere Arsenal, already confirmed as Group H winners which theoretically means a more favourable second round draw, lost 1-0 at Olympiakos with the Greeks grabbing the runners-up spot.

All that was left to decide in Group E was which of Fiorentina and Lyon would emerge as table toppers.

The French ended their first round campaign on a high, routing Debrecen 4-0 but lost out on the number one place after Fiorentina grabbed a late goal to beat Liverpool 2-1 at Anfield.

Yossi Benayoun's first half header had given the hosts a 43rd-minute lead against the run of play before Martin Jorgensen

levelled for the Italians after half time.

Alberto Gilardino's stoppage time winner then ensured Liverpool ended a disastrous Champions League campaign with only the Europa League to keep their minds off domestic battles.

In Group G already qualified Sevilla took top spot and were joined in the next round by Stuttgart.

The Germans responded to a change of manager - with former Tottenham boss Christian Gross replacing Markus Babel this week - in suitably positive fashion, racing to the quickest 3-0 lead in Champions League history.

Six first 11 minutes was all it took for Stuttgart to kill off their tie against Romanians Unirea Urziceni, who got one back for a 3-1 defeat.

"That was a fantastic start and it was great to take a 3-0 lead so quickly," said goalkeeper Jens Lehmann.

Tuesday's programme saw Bayern Munich, Real Madrid, AC Milan and CSKA Moscow seal their second round passage.

The second round draw is scheduled for December 18.



### BTV & ESPN

**Bangabandhu SAFF Championship SEMIFINALS**  
Maldives v Sri Lanka  
Live from 4:00pm  
Bangladesh v India  
Live from 7:30pm  
**TEN Sports**  
New Zealand v Pakistan  
Third Test, Day 1  
Live from 6:00am



**Bangabandhu SAFF Championship SEMIFINALS**  
Maldives v Sri Lanka (4:00pm)  
Bangladesh v India (7:30pm)  
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium



Sri Lankan players cool their nerves at the poolside of Sonargaon Hotel yesterday, ahead of their SAFF semifinal clash against holders Maldives today.