



WHICH SPORT IS THIS? Nepal Football Federation president Ganesh Thapa (R) tries to quell a rampant official of his team after an ugly episode that saw the Nepalese players and officials physically assault the referee following their 1-0 defeat against Maldives in the SA Games at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Women reach final Men look good too

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's kabaddi team confirmed at least a silver medal after reaching the final of the 11th South Asian (SA) Games while the men's team brightened their chances of playing in the final with their second successive victory at the Outer Stadium Kabaddi Court yesterday.

The women's team, that on Sunday defeated Nepal comfortably in their first match, recorded another impressive 35-20 win over Sri Lanka to seal the final berth. The girls got off to a flying start and went 12-3 up at one stage in the first half before Sri Lanka earned a lona and the half finished 20-9 in favour of the hosts.

Sri Lanka put up a spirited show in the second half and reduced the arrears scoring six successive points. At one stage they were just six points behind the hosts with only four minutes left in the game.

The hosts, however, defied the Lankan challenge and took the game beyond the islanders' reach scoring nine points in quick time with a lona in the last minute to confirm the final's berth.

Suffering their second successive defeat, Sri Lanka are out of running for any medals and will now take on Nepal which is only of academic interest.

"I am happy with the performance the girls put up today [Monday] as they have confirmed at least a silver beating Sri Lanka," said coach Abdul Hakim, who praised captain Farhana, Fatema and Hasna.

Farhana was also happy after confirming the

silver medal.

"We knew that we would be able to beat Sri Lanka easily, but they bounced back in the second half when we were a bit excited after having taken a huge lead, but we finally controlled the adrenaline to finish the game on a high note," said Farhana.

Bangladesh women's team will play their last group match against favourites India today.

Though Sri Lanka's women produced some resistance, their men surrendered to Bangladesh without much of a fight. Bangladesh won the game by 36-15 points after dominating the first half 20-05.

"We didn't take any risk in the second half following a 20-5 lead in the first and Sri Lanka capitalised on that opportunity to come back in the game. However, it was not threatening for us," said coach Abdul Jalil.

Jalil believes the match against Pakistan would be crucial to confirming the final as Pakistan put up a brave show against champions India.

"The boys played far better against Sri Lanka compared to the game against Nepal the other day and if the boys can carry this performance against Pakistan, it will not be a tough match for us," said Jalil.

In the men's event, Pakistan scared holders India before going down 19-15.

India dominated the first half with a 13-5 lead but they faced tough challenge from the Pakistanis, who reduced the arrears to 12-16 at one stage with a creditable lona. India however finally won the game and brightened their chances of playing in the final.

Bangladesh will take on Pakistan today and face India on January 3.

Nepalese turn ugly

SPORTS REPORTER

Ugly scenes followed the last whistle of the Nepal versus Maldives football match of the SA Games at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Hardly after the final whistle was blown, a host of Nepali players and a few officials came charging towards the match officials. Only police and organising committee officials came to rescue the officials from the fury of the Nepalese. Police had to cordon the match officials to safety.

Even the president of the Nepal Football Federation Ganesh Thapa was embroiled in the fracas. Thapa claimed that assistant referee Nasser Alshaffi had charged baton on Nepali player Jumanu Rai as he went for a hand shake which infuriated his colleagues and officials.

The Nepali players and officials had earlier stormed the pitch a couple of times even during the match protesting two penalty decisions that went against them.

It couldn't be immediately confirmed if Asian Football Confederation (AFC) would take any disciplinary action against Nepal. The assistant referee or the match referee declined to comment on the incident, but it was learned they would make an official allegation to the Disciplinary Committee.

More shame!

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh were once again embarrassed when organisers played wrong national anthem of Bhutan before the start of their South Asian Games football match against hosts Bangladesh at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

A journalist named Mohamed Afsal from Maldives identified that the national anthem of Maldives was being played instead of Bhutan's just prior to the start of the game.

Football organisers declined to comment on this, but one official urging not to be named said that the disc provided to them was titled Bhutan national anthem and we don't know how this happened.

Earlier, the hosts were embarrassed twice when the lift at a city hotel crashed down leaving six Nepali players and one official injured before the start of the opening ceremony and the newly-built Wooden Floor Gymnasium experienced a 45-minute power cut before the inaugural ceremony of badminton on Sunday.

Rafa denies Juve deal

AFP, London

Liverpool manager Rafael Benitez on Sunday denied that he has struck a deal with struggling Italian giants Juventus to take over at the end of the season.

"Contrary to reports in the Italian media this weekend, I want to make it absolutely clear I have no agreement with Juventus and have not and will not be meeting Juventus or their representatives or any other club," Benitez said in a statement.

"I have a long-term contract with Liverpool and I'll repeat what I said on Friday. I am happy here and my only focus is to do my job as well as I can to get the team back into the top four, beginning with the derby against Everton."

Bangladeshi's foul play

QUAZI AMANULLAH from Khulna



The 11th South Asian (SA) Games turned dirty and ugly on Monday when a Bangladeshi woman cyclist was spotted for receiving an undue push from an overenthusiastic official during competition and was eventually disqualified despite finishing first in the 50-km road race mass start at Khulna.

The athlete, caught for an act of cheating, was Marma Fatema Chingby while the official who embarrassed the whole nation was Olulul Islam, an ex-general secretary of Bangladesh Cycling Federation.

Fatema Chingby was just behind India's eventual gold winner Mahitha Mohan when 'fair play' turned foul play at Fakirhat turning point in Bagerhat district with Olulul pushing her cycle from behind, said Ajmol Ahmed Tapon, joint convener of the 86-member organising committee of the cycling event of 11th SA Games. It was also learnt that Fatema Chingby and the other Bangladeshi cyclist did not take the compulsory U-turn.

This incident sparked widespread resentment among the managers of other participating countries and they strongly condemned it terming the act as an unfair play.

However, Mahitha emerged as a true champion by winning the race in one hour 25 minutes and 42 seconds while Sri Lanka's Lasanthi Krishna Horathal took the silver with a timing of one hour 28 minutes and 34 seconds.

India's Rameshwori Debi claimed the bronze after finishing with a timing of one hour 28 minutes and 35 seconds.

It was India's third goal in the cycling competition and the regional superpower will look forward to a clean sweep by winning the men's 170-kilometre road race mass start today, the concluding day of the cycling event.

"I feel really proud to represent my country. It is really good to win a gold and we all now will rally behind our men's team to win the 170-km road race mass start event so that we can leave this place with full satisfaction," said gold winner Mahitha.

However, apart from that unwanted episode, the cycling competition created a festive atmosphere in the southern headquarters of the country and its surrounding districts with hundreds of people cheering the athletes during the last three days of the competition.

The Khulna-Bagerhat-Mawa highway turned vibrant with people from Khulna, Bagerhat, Fakirhat and Mollahat pouring in numbers to witness the race.

Ahmed Faisal Bappi, a 20-year-old youth from Majhidanga village of Karapara Union, took the pain of riding his own bicycle for nearly 20 kilometres to see the women's race, reports our Bagerhat correspondent.

"I have seen cycling competitions only on television before, so I did not want to miss an opportunity to see this with my own

eyes. And to make sure that I don't let this opportunity go, I woke up very early this morning," said Meenakshi Biswas, an 18-year-old girl of Mouvogh village.

"I was really happy to see an international event here. I was also amazed to see hundreds of people forming human chain for miles during the competition," observed Harun Ur Rashid, a businessman of Fakirhat.

Meanwhile, local authorities have suspended classes of some schools close to the vicinity of the highway and a class eight student of Keramat Ali High School said: "I really enjoyed the race as my school remained closed on Sunday and Monday."



SHE DOESN'T DESERVE IT: Marma Fatema Chingby shows victory sign to the crowd after the 50-km road race mass start in Khulna yesterday. The Bangladeshi cyclist was disqualified for her act of cheating during the race.

Egypt's 3rd title in a row

AFP, Luanda



Egypt entered the record books here on Sunday, beating Ghana 1-0 in the final of the Africa Cup of Nations with supersub Mohamed 'Gedo' Nagy lifting the Pharaohs to their third straight title.

Gedo, who has scored from the bench in Egypt's last four games in Angola, came on in the 63rd minute and produced his magic with five minutes left on the clock to cement Egypt's standing as the kings of Africa.

The win also gave veteran coach Hassan Shehata a history-making third championship after Cairo in 2006 and Accra in 2008 and extended Egypt's unbeaten record in the competition to an astonishing 19 games.

Shehata's assistant, Shawkhy Garib, said: "I'd like to congratulate Ghana for what they did today (Sunday)."

"It's important to take your chance, and today we took it. But we respect the Ghana team, they played a very good match today."

"We said we were the champions from the first day we arrived in Angola, and we would defend our title."

"We have won three titles in 2006, 2008 and 2010. This was the most difficult of all of them."

Ghana coach Milovan Rajevic, who has worked wonders to put the World Cup qualifiers into their first continental final in 18 years with most of his top players injured, commented: "We are not so experienced, we wanted to win it so badly in our hearts but in the end Egyptian experience was crucial."

Egypt were unchanged

Geremi heads to Turkey

AFP, London

Cameroon international Geremi has left Newcastle and signed for Turkish side Ankaragucu, the English club confirmed on Monday.

The former Real Madrid and Chelsea midfielder had been presented as an Ankaragucu player at the start of January but the final details of the transfer were only wrapped up at the weekend, allowing the transfer to go through on the final day of the mid-season window.

Geremi, 31, had been at Newcastle since 2007 and was briefly club captain under former manager Sam Allardyce.

The tough-tackling midfielder started this season as a first-team regular but fell out of favour with manager Chris Hughton, who was keen to off-load one of the highest earners at St James' Park.



UNITED WE WIN: Bangladesh women kabaddi players run in unison to stop a Sri Lankan player during their SA Games clash at the Kabaddi Stadium yesterday.

PCB vows to rectify

Cricket

AFP, Karachi

Pakistan cricket vowed Monday to redress major failings after their crushing defeat at the hands of Australia in the Tests and one-day series, with former players demanding a purge from the top.

Pakistan were routed 3-0 in the Tests and 5-0 in the one-day matches. It was their fourth straight 3-0 humiliation against Australia in Tests and only their second defeat such white-wash in one-day cricket.

"A full-time analysis is needed and we will definitely take corrective measures to improve the performance of our national team," Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chief operating officer Wasim Bari told AFP.

"We, at the PCB, are as disappointed as any other cricket fan," he added.

After Pakistan's fourth defeat in the one-day series last Friday, protesters burnt an effigy of PCB chairman Ijaz Butt and demanded his dismissal.

A symbolic funeral for Pakistan cricket was held recently in southern city Hyderabad after Pakistan were blanked in the three-Test series by Australia.

"Fans expect a lot from the team and after the defeat they vented their anger. But we are going to address the grey areas and do our best to remove those flaws," said Bari, a former captain and wicketkeeper.

"The top weakness is in our fielding," he acknowledged.

"Nearly 30 dropped catches on the tour of Australia and New Zealand and six, seven run-outs speak of the great weakness in fielding and we are looking for a specialist fielding coach to improve this area," said Bari.

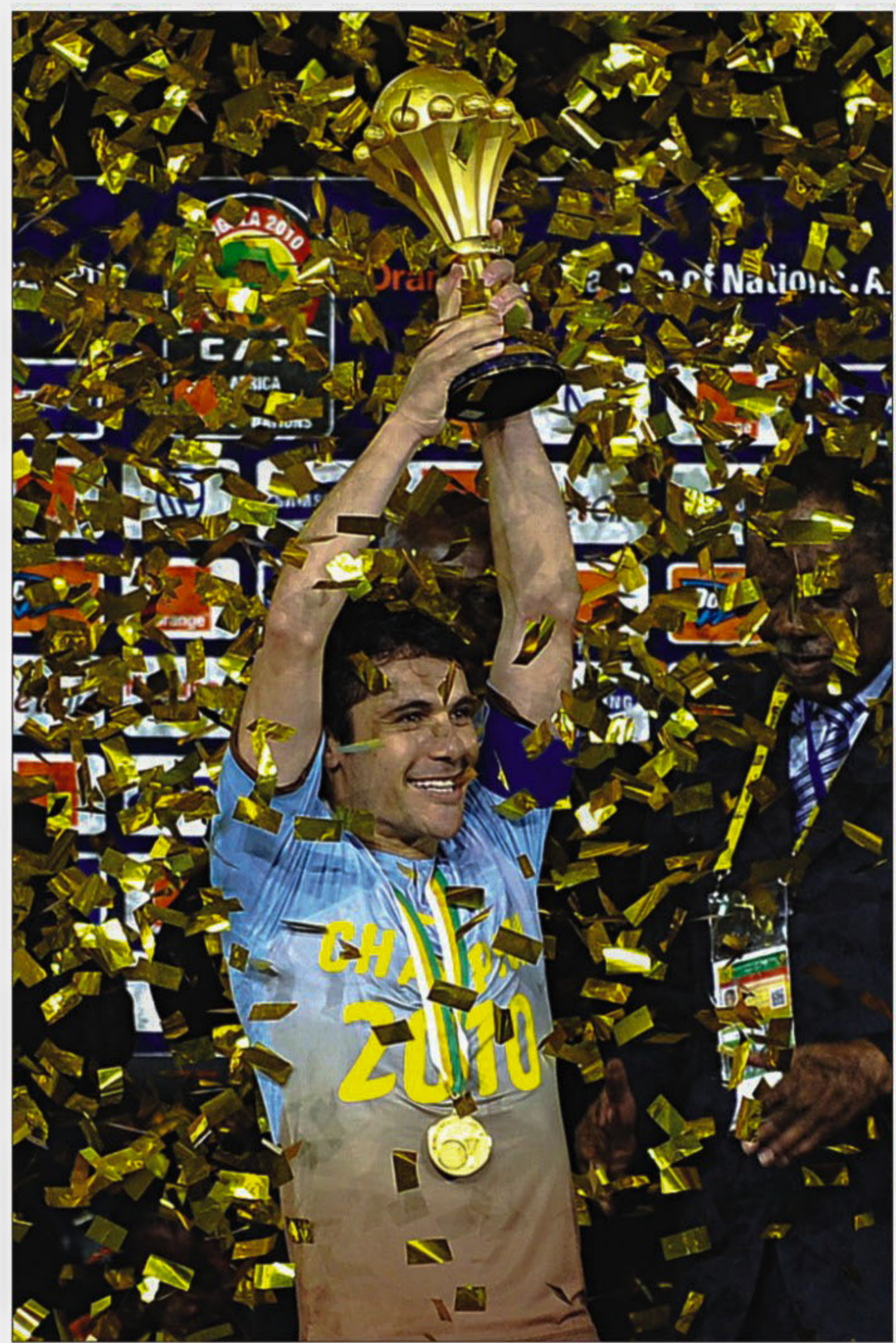
"If we improve our fielding and show character in matches then we can give tough times to all the teams in the world and we have done that in the past," said Bari.

But last week hinted at major changes in team captaincy and management -- blamed by experts as the main reason for defeat.

Veteran player Mohammad Yousof was appointed captain after Younus Khan withdrew from the tour of New Zealand and made himself unavailable for the Test series in Australia.

But former pacemen Sarfraz Nawaz and Abdul Qadir demanded change in the PCB.

"The officials of the PCB have failed to deliver," Nawaz told AFP. "There must be change at the top and if that doesn't happen our performance will not improve."



Egypt captain Ahmed Hassan celebrates with the Africa Cup of Nations trophy after winning the final against Ghana in Luanda on Sunday.