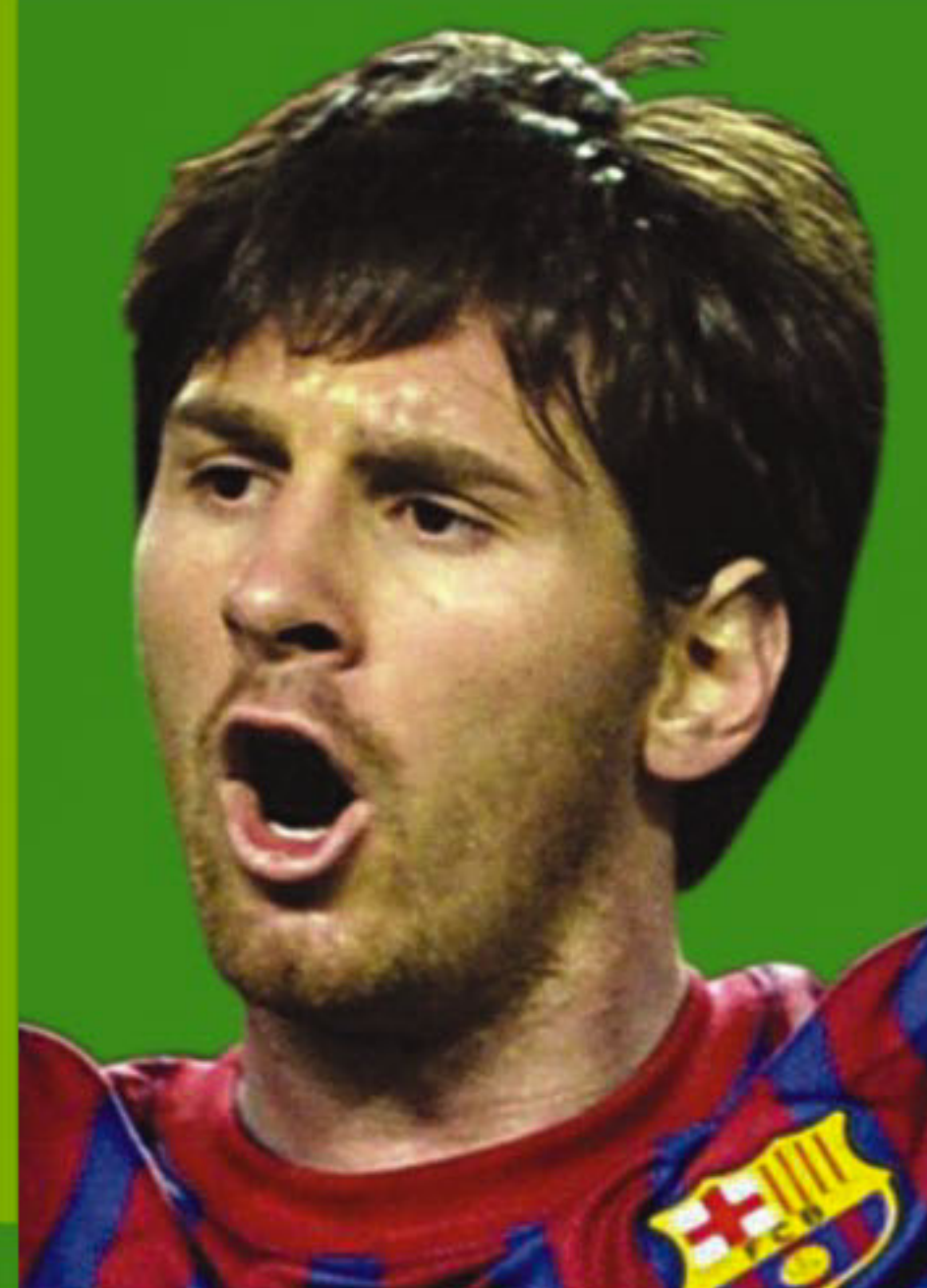


Messi best-paid footballer

Argentina's Lionel Messi is the world's highest-paid footballer, followed by David Beckham of England and Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo, according to France Football magazine. Barcelona talisman Messi earns some 33 million euros (\$43.5 million) a year with a 10.5-million-euro salary, 1.5 million euros in bonuses and 21 million euros in advertising and other contracts. Former Manchester United midfielder Beckham, now at LA Galaxy, takes home 31.5 million euros, largely due to his 26 million euros' worth of advertising and endorsement contracts. Real Madrid's Ronaldo earns 29.2 million euros.



DHAKA WEDNESDAY MARCH 21, 2012, E-MAIL: sports@thedailystar.net



Opening batsman Tamim Iqbal (L) hugs Nasir Hossain after the all-rounder hit the winning runs against Sri Lanka in their Asia Cup 'semifinal' at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Impossible is nothing

BISHWAJIT ROY



Mushfiqur Rahim's men introduced a new Bangladesh to world cricket by reaching the final of the Asia Cup after beating Sri Lanka in the must-win game at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. Bangladesh beat a team like India and South Africa to book their place in the second round of the 2007 World Cup in West Indies and they had a tremendous 4-0 success against New Zealand at home but nothing could be compared with their success last night which took them to a new height because it's the first time in their history that they showed such consistency in their performance.

One can easily say that it's a beginning of a new era for Bangladesh cricket. Without any doubt, Bangladesh played as a true unit because one could not single out 2-3 players behind the success but rather a number of players came to show their characteristics, which is something new for Bangladesh cricket. Still one will not argue if someone says that Shakib Al Hasan and Tamim Iqbal are the torchbearers of the brave new era. It was their brilliant partnership that shaped the 5-wicket victory apart from the magnificent finishing touches from Nasir Hossain and Mahmudullah Riyad. The two brave cricketers appeared in the post-match briefing where they expressed their emotions and explained the reasons behind the success. Tamim cut a cake after the press conference to celebrate this historic moment and his 23rd birthday.



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United in joy

MOHAMMAD ISAM



To see glory from such close quarters is a pleasure unto itself. Some of us are lucky to hear Stuart Law break into a broad smile while walking into the dressing-room to join the team song Aamra Korbo Joy. The former Australian cricketer said in an interview to this newspaper only a few days ago that the win against India will mean nothing if the Tigers don't beat Sri Lanka and make it to the final of the Asia Cup. So does the five-wicket win in the last league game, which took his side to the dream final, mean a lot to him; is he happy? "Very happy, mate." Yes, even the stern Lawman was happy. So was Mushfiqur Rahim's father Mahub Hamid who hugged Nasir Hossain. So was chief selector Akram Khan and his colleagues Habibul Bashar and Minhazul Abedin. Akram lifted the country's first cup of note, the ICC Trophy in 1997, but ahead of this tournament, the man who takes all the selectorial calls found himself compromised. He quit, only to be brought back after a talk with the country's Prime Minister of all people. Did Akram think of a place in the Asia Cup final when all that was going on?

"At the time I knew that I was not in the Asia Cup. But yes, credit to the boys," he said standing outside the Tigers' dressing room at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium. "It was a total team effort. Look at Tamim Iqbal, he changed his way of playing just so that he can contribute to the team. The bowlers too were brilliant." Bashar was emotional too. The man who led the Tigers in a sterling performance in the 2007 World Cup thought that such consistency is unique. "I have never seen such cricket from the national team. Even in the World Cup of 2007 we beat two big teams but not in this manner. Here they improved every game and corrected mistakes. I am really happy with this," he said. Shafiqul Islam, he with the shoulder injury, was in the hospitality boxes at the south end of the ground but as the end drew near, he couldn't handle himself. He walked towards the grandstand and watched the last part from the balcony on the first level. All these happy people were smiling last night because some other people, equally happy and singing in the dressing room at that moment, made all this happen. If Shakib Al Hasan was Superman in October 2010, the Asia Cup is the work of the Justice League. Tamim Iqbal came into his own with his

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Best already, even better it may get

SAKEB SUBHAN

Days like yesterday, when Bangladesh beat Sri Lanka to reach the Asia Cup final for the first time in history, transcends the limitations of sport. To understand the importance of such an achievement, one not only needs to appreciate the travails of the Bangladesh cricket fan, but also the peculiarities of life in Bangladesh. People queue up on the streets in the heat hours before the match is due to start, they jostle for position in the stands where seat numbers usually mean as much as the traffic lights did when they were wrestling the congested streets on the way to the ground, and then they pray for a Bangladesh victory -- a prayer that often went unanswered in the past. "We are overjoyed at the result," said Tushar, a university student who had come to watch the match yesterday at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium. "We always believed Bangladesh could win, always. Yes, when Shakib [Al Hasan] was out, I had my doubts. But what a win!" The atmosphere in Mirpur when Bangladesh are doing well is always special, but yesterday was more so. The loudspeakers were blaring inspirational Bangla songs. When Kazi Nazrul Islam's blood-stirring "Kar oi louho kopat" came on, it drew a choral reply from the thousands in attendance. When they were not singing many in the audience were seen praying as Mahmudullah Riyad and Nasir Hossain were taking the Tigers to an eventuality that seemed impossible less than two weeks ago.

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Bangladesh pacer Nazmul Hossain (2nd from R) does a high-five with substitute fielder Imrul Kayes after dismissing a Sri Lanka batsman during their Asia Cup encounter at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

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