

# SPORT

## Bangladesh in Group of Death

### GROUPINGS

**Group A:** India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan.  
**Group B:** Afghanistan, Maldives, Sri Lanka, Bhutan.

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Bangladesh have been placed in Group A alongside defending champions India, hosts Nepal and Pakistan as the groupings of the SAFF Championship were held at the Soaltee Crown Plaza in Kathmandu, Nepal yesterday.

Group B is relatively easier one as it consists of runners-up Afghanistan, Maldives, Sri Lanka and Bhutan. The participating teams were placed in three separate pots for the draw with champions India and runners-up Afghanistan kept in one pot so that they do not face each other before the semifinal stage. The two beaten semifinalists of last edition – Nepal and Maldives – were in the second pot while the remaining four teams including Bangladesh were in the third pot.

Bangladesh will face Nepal on the opening day's second match at the Dashrath Stadium on September 1 and will take on India and Pakistan on September 3 and 5 respectively. Two matches will take place each day in the group stages, up to September

6, the first one starting at 3:30pm and the second one starting at 6:30pm Bangladesh time.

The 2003 champions, Bangladesh, were eliminated from the group stages in the last edition in 2011 after playing a goalless draw against Pakistan, losing 1-0 against Nepal and 1-3 against Maldives. But this time Bangladesh have set their sights on the final of and roped in Dutch coach Lodewijk de Kruijff, who will get two months to prepare his side.

"We have been placed in the Group of Death where we have to face two favourites India and Nepal. From my point of view, Afghanistan got lucky in the groupings. Anyway we will have to play our game," De Kruijff was quoted as saying in Thailand, according to a BFF press release.

In head to head encounters in the SAFF championship, Bangladesh have beaten India once, drew twice and lost three times in the six meetings so far. Bangladesh have won twice and lost twice against Pakistan while they have won three times against Nepal and lost only once.

Local coach Saiful Bari Titu, who

guided Mohammedan to Super Cup triumph this season, believes Bangladesh have the ability to play in the semifinals as there is nothing to be frightened about five-time champions India and hosts Nepal.

"No doubt, Bangladesh's group is a tough one but I don't see any reason to be afraid as you have to beat anyone if you want to be champions," said Titu, the former national coach. "India may be considered the top side in the group, but considering the most recent performances, Bangladesh should beat hosts Nepal and Pakistan to ensure a place in the semifinals as the second team from the group," said Titu adding that if Bangladesh do move to the semifinals, then it would be easier for them to get into the final as they would have played some hard matches already in the group-stages.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh will play their first practice match against Osotspa Saraburi FC, the fifth-place finisher in the Thai Premier League, at the Saraburi Central Stadium in Thailand today. Bangladesh are supposed to play another practice match on August 3 against an age-group side.

## BCCI probe ruled illegal

AFP, New Delhi

An Indian court ruled Tuesday a probe ordered by the country's cricket chiefs into a betting scandal was illegal, causing further trouble for cricket head Narayanaswami Srinivasan, reports said.

The Bombay High Court, which retains Mumbai's former name, ruled a panel set up to probe the betting scandal in the Indian Premier League (IPL) competition was "illegal" and "unconstitutional".

The ruling comes just two days after the panel's report, leaked to the media, found no wrongdoing by senior cricket officials or IPL owners over the scandal.

Tuesday's ruling could derail the return of Srinivasan, who stepped aside temporarily as president of the Board of Control for Cricket in India on June 2.

## MUSHFIQUR relishes toughest WC

SPORTS REPORTER



One of the more crucial tasks for Bangladesh during the 2015 World Cup in Australia and New Zealand will be to overcome the bouncy and seaming conditions of the wickets in the region are known for. Considering that the majority of Bangladesh's frontline pacers are currently recovering from injury or have been

out of action for a long time, the signs aren't that positive.

Therefore it was not surprising to hear Bangladesh captain Mushfiqur Rahim, following the announcement of the pools, saying that the 2015 World Cup would be Bangladesh's 'toughest'.

"This will probably be the toughest World Cup for us. The conditions will be perfect for Australia, New Zealand and England and it will be totally different to playing those sides in the subcontinent. Sri Lanka also have more experience there. It is extremely important therefore how we prepare," a BCB press release quoting Mushfiqur stated.

Head coach Shane Jurgensen echoed Mushfiqur's sentiments and told The Daily Star that improving the fitness levels of the players, especially the pacers, before the world cup was his top priority.

"I need my fast bowlers to be fit and healthy before the world cup. We have to raise our fitness levels to another level. It's really crucial for me that we have a consistent amount of players on the field and make sure we have the right combination," said Shane, who was recently given the reigns of coaching the Tigers till the 2015 World Cup.

Bangladesh have the difficult task of playing against both hosts. They'll play Australia at the Woolloongabba in Brisbane and New Zealand at Hamilton.

Mushfiqur though is relishing the challenge. "I am particularly excited with the prospect of playing in Brisbane, Melbourne and Adelaide for the first time. We have had some notable performances in Hamilton during our last visit. The game against the hosts could be quite a treat," he said. He also hoped to get ample support from the Bangladesh expatriate community in Australia and New Zealand.

Jurgensen on the other hand stated that the game against Australia would be one of the tougher asks for the Tigers. "Facing Australia at the Gabba will be difficult. The Gabba is a very fast sort of a pitch. The boys will need to get prepared for that pitch," he said.

However, the 37-year-old, who had earlier coached New Zealand and played domestic cricket in Australia stated that his inside track on the teams can be an advantage. "I probably know these two teams very well, so in terms of strategy and tactics it's a positive thing. So I am really excited to face the hosts," he said.

While the coach did state the worries of playing in foreign conditions, he expects some assistance for the spinners. "Some of the venues are not in our favour but the wickets on which we'll play some of our crucial matches have the potential to turn. Adelaide [vs England] turns sometimes and so does Hamilton. So there will be some help for our bowlers," he said.



PHOTO: STAR

The national hockey team was back in action in earnest at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday as the camp resumed after a day's interruption.

## Abul's surgery in Thailand?

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board is mulling over sending pacer Abul Hasan, who is suffering from a slipped disc and requires a surgery, to Thailand.

The move, which is yet to be confirmed, however, was criticised by a section of the team management who are for sending the 21-year-old to Australia, arguing that back surgeries are always critical and not giving Abul the best possible treatment could possibly hinder his career. Supporters of the decision stated that there are hospitals in Thailand that have dealt with such cases. It was learnt that the cost of the treatment in Australia would amount to approximately Tk 20 lakh, whereas in Thailand the cost would be halved.

## SAFF U-16 C'SHIP Young booters finish third

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh U-16s football team found some solace in the SAFF U-16 Football Championship as they finished third after beating Afghanistan 1-0 in the place-deciding match at the Nepal Army Ground in Kathmandu yesterday.

Al Amin Tushar separated the sides in the 55th minute to bring victory for the young tigers. India emerged champions as they beat hosts Nepal by the same margin in the final.

Bangladesh U-16s side are scheduled to return home today.

## Players return to practice

SPORTS REPORTER



All the players of the national hockey team returned to the training camp for the Asia Cup yesterday after the Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) banned frontline leaders of the Hockey Players' Welfare Association (HPWA) for different periods following Monday's unexpected incidents at the Maulana Bhasani National Stadium.

HPWA president and former national goalkeeper Rasel Khan Bappi has been banned for life while general secretary Ariful Haque Prince and former national players Asaduzzaman Chandan, Ashiquzzaman and Shamsuddin Tuhin have been handed a five-year ban each from all activities related to hockey.

The game's governing body is also thinking of taking legal action against these players after consultation with the lawyers. Joint secretary of Abahani

hockey committee, Shahidullah Dolon, was also given a five-year suspension for sending a threatening SMS to national striker Rasel Mahmud Jimmy.

The decision came at an emergency meeting of the executive committee of BHF, presided over by vice president Abdus Sadek, which lasted approximately two and a half hours. After the meeting, the members of the committee also sat with the national players and asked them to join the camp in the afternoon, or risk facing life suspension from the national team in line with code of conduct.

"We are firmly condemning the incidents that took place yesterday (Monday). We all apologised to the coach (Naveed Alam). Bappi has been handed life ban while others – Prince, Ashik, Chandan and Tuhin – have been given five years' suspension each," said Abdus Sadek at a crowded press conference at the BHF office.

In demand of taking legal action against Shahidullah Dolon and inter-club players' transfer, the HPWA on

Monday forcefully halted the national team's camp, reportedly assaulted the coach and bribed the players to leave the camp. The players were however ensured of safety and allowed to stay at the stadium's dormitory as law enforcement agencies took control in the midnight.

"I never saw them (HPWA members) do any welfare work for the players, rather they always plot to design who would come to power. Bappi and Prince had a big role in dissolving the elected committee of Khandokar Jamil," said BHF vice president Abdur Rashid Shikdar, adding that the ongoing preparation camp for the Asia Cup never gained momentum due to frequent intervention of HPWA.

About the progress of the inter-club players' transfer for which the players have been staging protests, Abdur Rashid said that there is no chance of holding the transfers before the Asia Cup but they are trying to convince the clubs that have decided not to take part in the transfers.

## 'Let the ball roll first'

SPORTS REPORTER



Another fresh date has been announced for this year's dilly-dallying Dhaka Premier Division Cricket League (DPL). That is certainly welcome news for a bulk of the country's cricketers, especially those who depend on this lone 50-over tournament for a lion's share of income, even though their income will be reduced this season because of the new payment system.

The announcement of dates for the players' transfers and the tournament start still leaves room for doubt in their minds.

"Let the ball roll first; only then can you say that finally the league has taken place. Most players are practising with the hope that the league takes place but you know dates have been announced one after another so far, so the fear is there," said out-of-favour Bangladesh batsman Rajin Saleh yesterday.

The fear is perfectly understandable, as Monday's announcement was the fifth occasion that the board released a schedule for the most coveted 50-over competition in the country.

"It's really good news that the BCB announced dates for the league and we appreciated the board's decision. Many players are desperately looking forward to this competition. But we fear whether the board can keep their promise this time," said another experienced cricketer who did not want to mention his name.

As per the latest schedule the DPL is set to begin on September 3 and the players' transfer of the competition will be held on August 25.

The Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolis is yet to formally convey the decision to the clubs but chairman Jalal Yunus said that there was no uncertainty over the new date.

"Without any doubt the league will take place according to the new schedule. The clubs wanted this new schedule, so there is no question about any further delay and another delay will mean we will not be able to arrange the league this season. The by-laws are all but finalised and we are going to announce the grading of players for the transfer very soon," said Yunus yesterday.

And everybody was surprised by the announcement that the clubs agreed to play the Super League without the national players in October.

If that is the case then the million dollar question is: why were they reluctant to play the league in March? And consequently who will eventually take the responsibility for upsetting the entire domestic calendar?

## Teams seek life in dead rubber

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka and South Africa will not let the intensity slip in Wednesday's fifth and final ODI in Colombo even though the hosts have already wrapped up the series.

The day-night game at the Premadasa Stadium will hold only academic interest as Sri Lanka gained an unassailable 3-1 lead following their eight-wicket win in Pallekele on Sunday.

South Africa captain AB de Villiers said he wants a win to improve his nation's poor track record in Sri Lanka, where the Proteas have won just two of their 14 completed one-dayers going back to 1993.

"There is a lot to gain from the last game," de Villiers said.

"We have not won much in Sri Lanka, so we are very keen to finish on a high."

Sri Lanka skipper Angelo Mathews insisted his side was looking to add to the tourists' woes by winning the last match to make it a 4-1 scoreline.

## BJMC lose

SPORTS REPORTER

Team BJMC tasted their second defeat in three matches in the King's Cup when they lost 0-1 against LaxmiBank Three Star Club of Nepal in Changlimithang, Thimphu yesterday. Pukar Gahatraj scored the only goal of the match in the 67th minute to give the Nepalese side the win.

## Canary Wharf selects 28

SPORTS REPORTER

Fourteen talented footballers of the under-14 age group from greater Sylhet region have been selected for the Canary Wharf Football Academy which will train the booters for four years in both Sylhet and London. The selection process started with 90 young booters from greater Sylhet region on June 29 under the guidance of Brazilian coach Wilson Ronaldo.

The selected players have been asked to report to Fazlur Rahman Babul, chief co-ordinator of the project, at Kusai in Sylhet on August 16.

## SPOT-FIXING IN IPL

### Sree among 39 charged

AFP, New Delhi

Indian prosecutors charged bowler Shanthakumaran Sreesanth and 38 others Tuesday with links to organised crime and cheating over their alleged role in spot-fixing in the Indian Premier League, a lawyer said.

Special public prosecutor Rajesh Mohan told AFP that the 39 had been formally charged under the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act over alleged offences in the last edition of the tournament.

"The players and others have also been charged with criminal conspiracy, cheating and dishonesty," Mohan told AFP.

Sreesanth and two teammates from the IPL team the Rajasthan Royals, Ajit Chandila and Ankeet Chavan, and numerous bookmakers were arrested over allega-

tions of spot-fixing and betting during this year's edition of the Twenty20 tournament.

Delhi police told the trial court that the accused were "part of a larger betting syndicate" controlled by underworld don Dawood Ibrahim and his aide Chhota Shakeel. The underworld figures have also been named as accused in the charge sheet, said Mohan.

Dawood, an Indian national thought to be living in Pakistan, has been accused by Indian authorities of crimes including the 1993 Mumbai bomb blasts.

The accused cricketers "knowingly abetted the operation of this international organised crime syndicate", according to the police.

Sreesanth is the most famous of the three cricketers arrested, having played 27 Tests for India.