

# SPORT

## DO-OR-DIE against India

ATIQUÉ ANAM from Kathmandu

Bangladesh will take on six-time champions India in a do-or-die match of their 10th SAFF Championship campaign today, knowing that anything but a win might put their hopes of progressing through the group stages into jeopardy. Going 2-0 down in their opening match against Nepal, Bangladesh face the favourites in the group, who already have three points in their bag, having beaten Pakistan 1-0 on Sunday. The match starts at 3:45pm Bangladesh time at the Halchowk Stadium in Kathmandu.

The task at hand for Bangladesh is a daunting one, when one considers the recent record between the teams. The last time Bangladesh managed to beat their mighty neighbours was a decade ago, in the 2003 SAFF Championship, where Bangladesh won 2-1 in extra time to move into the final and lift the title. The most recent meeting of the senior teams was in the 2009 SAFF Championship where Bangladesh lost 0-1.

But after watching India's not-so-up-to-the-mark performance against Pakistan, Bangladesh coach and players are taking heart that winning against India is not an impossible task. Coach Lodewijk de Kruif said his side were confident and under no pressure before taking on their mighty rivals.

"The expectations about India were a bit more (than what they actually performed). So in that respect, you can say we can have confidence. But at the end of the day, we need three points and we want to achieve something tomorrow," said the Dutchman. "That will keep us in the tournament or else the game against Pakistan will be of no use."

De Kruif hinted that he would play the same formation which is 4-2-3-1/4-3-3 but might make a change in his line-up. Midfielder Sohel Rana is fit again to start and might replace Atiqur Rahman in mid-field. Mamunul Islam is still not fully fit, but might come off the bench later in the match, given that he makes a good enough recovery in the hours leading up to the match.

De Kruif's opposite number and once his mentor Wim Koevermans felt his side were under-par against Pakistan and need to be on their guard against Bangladesh.

"What we played against Pakistan, there's a huge scope of improvement. We are confident but not complacent" said Koevermans after his side's training session yesterday. "Bangladesh watched us play. They may have lost the first game but are not out of the championship as yet. Obviously they will come hard at us. It's their last chance to stay alive. But we need to focus on ourselves."

Considering the way the two teams played, the fate of the match could be decided in details, how expertly players in each position perform their duties, making the least number of mistakes.

"We have to put pressure (on the opposition) and not give them time to play their game. The match will be decided in details, how much eager our midfielders are to put pressure, how much prepared our defenders are to defend tightly," said De Kruif.

Bangladesh (probable): Mamun Khan (GK); Nasiruddin Chowdhury (C); Ariful Haque, Wali Faisal, Ashraf Mahmud Linkon; Jamal Bhuiyan, Sohel Rana, Zahid Hossain, Taklis Ahmed, Zahid Hsain Emily; Wahed Ahmed.

HEAD TO HEAD				
OVERALL				
Country	Played	Won	Draw	Lost
Bangladesh	27	3	8	16
India	27	16	8	3
SAFF CHAMPIONSHIP				
Bangladesh	8	1	2	5
India	8	5	2	1

## Vital 3-dayer starts today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

The national cricketers reached Khulna yesterday to play the three-day practice match which will start today at the Sheikh Abu Naser Stadium.

It will be the first time that the Tigers play longer-version cricket since the Test series in Lanka in their group opener at the Dasarath Rangasala Stadium in Kathmandu.

Asadullah Abdullah gave Maldives a five-minute lead before Ashfaq scored in the 21st minute and in stoppage time of the first half to go for the break with a comfortable 3-0 lead. After resumption, Ashfaq struck three goals inside seven minutes to widen the margin to 6-0.

Ali Faisal and Ali Umar also wrote their names on the score-sheet before Ashfaq completed the rout striking his sixth goal four minutes from time.

At the Halchowk Stadium, last edition's runners-up Afghanistan defeated Bhutan 3-0 with captain Haroon Fakrudin, Mustafa and Hasmatullah scoring one goal each.

Favourites Maldives and Afghanistan began their Group B campaign of the SAFF Championship on winning notes at two different venues in Kathmandu, Nepal yesterday.

Striker Ali Ashfaq struck six goals to power Maldives to a massive 10-0 win over 10-man Sri Lanka in their group opener at the Dasarath Rangasala Stadium in Kathmandu.

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Bangladesh booters are hard at work during a practice session at the Armed Forces ground yesterday, ahead of today's do-or-die clash against defending SAFF champions India at the Dasarath Stadium in Kathmandu.

PHOTO: ATIQUÉ ANAM

## Club more important than country?

ATIQUÉ ANAM from Kathmandu

The Bangladesh team have hit a wrong corner at the wrong time. When the players needed to be fully fit and focused, they have started to wear out. But whether it is an impact of their injuries or a lack of personal motivation is the question many people are asking. Many answers have been mooted with some pointing to the upcoming transfer season and the fear of missing out due to injury as the reason for the lack of effort from the players.

The transfer season was scheduled to start on August 16, but was later deferred to August 24. Most of the national team players have received 'token money' from the

clubs they are expected to join next season, but the big chunk of the payment remains to be paid later. The fear of losing that money in case of a serious injury might put the players off from giving their best effort, people close to the players are speculating.

One official inside the team bluntly said: "There is a serious lack of personal motivation. They are not risking injuries ahead of the transfer season."

The day after Bangladesh's match against Nepal, an Indian journalist asked: "That number 7 player (Zahid Hossain) is so good usually, but what happened to him yesterday? He was way off-colour."

But it was not only Zahid, some of the more experienced players in the side looked short of motivation and failed to give their best effort. The team doctor is also wonder-

ing why the injuries to Mamunul Islam and Sohel Rana are taking so much time to heal. "We have checked their (Mamunul Islam and Sohel Rana) medical reports and there is no fracture on their knees. These injuries don't take long to heal, but I can't understand why their pain is still there," said team doctor Imran Ali.

Bangladesh Football Federation's (BFF) vice-president and National Team Committee chairman Kazi Nabil Ahmed, who is in Kathmandu to watch the team's matches, said the coach had expressed his dissatisfaction over the performance of some of the players. "I talked with the coach after the Nepal match. He did not name any names, but said he was disappointed with the performance of three to four players."

Bangladesh skipper Mamunul Islam, who is still recovering from a knee injury he received on August 21 during a practice match for the national team, laughed off the suggestion. "You can't do anything about injuries. But when on the field, we try to give our best," said Mamunul, who had also said that the coach tried to have him on the field till the last moment against Nepal, but that he was not feeling up to it.

Whether or not these injuries and the effort of the players are what they look like, BFF can make sure the players give their all, by ensuring their long-term medical treatments in case some of them get injured during the camp. It has hardly been done in the past, but it is a case which needs serious addressing.

## Delay inexplicable

Papon ready to face Saber 'anytime'

SPORTS REPORTER



It has been more than a month since the Supreme Court cleared the way for the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) elections to take place under the amended 2012 constitution. Despite the go-ahead, the BCB's ad-hoc committee is yet to complete some of the most basic processes for the elections to begin and is unable to provide a fixed set of dates for the elections.

The remaining processes includes sending a letter to the clubs, district and divisional sports associations and the remaining participants asking them for the names of their councillors who will be voting in the board's directors. The letter was supposed to be sent right after Eid.

The delay has led many to doubt if the elections will take place at all.

However, speaking to reporters at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday, BCB president Nazmul Hassan Papon stated that the elections would 'definitely take place', albeit slightly later than originally thought.

"The letter will be sent in seven to eight days' time. We want to host the elections this month as per the schedule but we have to sit and see how much time the entire process will take. If not this month, then it will definitely take place within the first week of October, before Eid," said Papon.

The reasons offered by Papon for



the delaying as simple a task as sending a letter seemed to hold no water whatsoever. "There are many, many reasons behind it. Firstly there were some legal issues, each of them needed to be vetted legally. Because if something wrong happens and then we have to go to the court again, then the elections are going to be hampered and I don't want that,"

## 'I welcome it'

SPORTS REPORTER

Former Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Saber Hossain Chowdhury welcomed incumbent board president Nazmul Hassan Papon's response to his invitation for a face-to-face discussion regarding some issues surrounding the BCB elections.

"I welcome it because he has responded to my invitation, though belatedly. It would be better if it takes place before the start of the election process as we are going to talk about a number of issues surrounding the elections," said Saber in his immediate reaction after Papon yesterday said that he was ready to face his predecessor and competitor at any place and at any time.

"I would prefer a live discussion on TV where media personnel can ask their desired questions from the audience and seek clarification," he added.

He also said that there should be a specific agenda, so that it does not stray from the confines of a constructive discussion. "I think the discussion should focus on how we can have a transparent, credible and inclusive election, the result of which will make the process sustainable and above all controversies."



he said. He however, did not elaborate on the legal matters.

Furthermore, he stated that over the last month the board was too busy trying to arrange a suitable window for the Dhaka Premier League and working on the world cup venues in order to meet the demands of the ICC inspection team.

Many speculated that Papon was delaying the nomination process of the councillors in order to gain an edge over his opponent Saber Hossain Chowdhury.

Papon however, dismissed those claims and replied with a statement that he has used quite a few times in the last two months. "You (media) will all know the truth in a month's time. You will have all the answers, just wait a bit."

The last few weeks have seen Papon's opponent invite him for a live discussion regarding the elections, the constitution and various other issues. Papon however, could not be reached for a response.

Yesterday though he told the media that he could meet Chowdhury 'any day, anytime and at any place' to discuss the specific issues in the presence of the media. "I was not in the country for a long time and hence I could not respond. However, after I returned I had met him at the (Hazrat Shahjalal International) airport and told him that I wanted to have a discussion with him that would be on record," said Papon.

## Sachin won't retire after WI series

HINDUSTAN TIMES, New Delhi

Despite reports that the proposed home series against West Indies will offer the stage for Sachin Tendulkar's retirement, Hindustan Times has reliably learnt that the batsman is keen to tour South Africa and even New Zealand early next year for the two Tests.

Discussions with some of Tendulkar's close aides and cricket control board officials though suggest that the Tests in November will give him an opportunity to bid goodbye to his home fans.

## American men hit new low

AFP, New York



American men's tennis slumped to an historic Grand Slam low on a sweltering Sunday at the US Open as Novak Djokovic and Andy Murray remained on course for a blockbuster semifinal.

Wildcard Tim Smyczek was America's last hope of avoiding the embarrassment of not having a man in the fourth round of the country's own Grand Slam for the first time in the Open era.

But Spain's Marcel Granollers delivered the executioner's blow when he beat 109th-ranked Smyczek 6-4, 4-6, 0-6, 6-3, 7-5 to reach the last 16 and condemn the US to humiliation in a sport they once dominated.

In an historic flop, no US man reached the fourth round of any of the year's four majors.

Djokovic, the reigning Australian Open champion and the US Open titlist in 2011, brushed aside world number 95 Joao Sousa, the first Portuguese man to make the third round, 6-0, 6-2, 6-2 to make the last 16.

Third-seeded defending champion Murray eased past Germany's world number 49 Florian Mayer, 7-6 (7/2), 6-2, 6-2 while 2001 champion Lleyton Hewitt maintained his

dream run with a 6-3, 7-6 (7/5), 6-1 win over Russia's Evgeny Donskoy.

Murray, the reigning Olympic and Wimbledon champion, will next face Uzbekistan's world number 65 Denis Istomin, who put out Italian 20th seed Andreas Seppi, 6-3, 6-4, 2-6, 3-6, 6-1.

32-year-old Hewitt will next face Russia's 21st seed Mikhail Youzhny, twice a semifinalist, who put out German 12th seed Tommy Haas 6-3, 6-2, 2-6, 6-3.

Berdych, who defeated five-time winner Roger Federer on his way to the semi-finals last year, eased past French 31st seed Julien Benneteau, 6-0, 6-3, 6-2.

Wawrinka, a quarterfinalist in 2010, got past unseeded Cypriot Marcos Baghdatis, the former world number eight but now down at 53 in the world, 6-3, 6-2, 6-7 (1/7), 7-6 (9/7).

In the women's section defending champion Serena Williams won her much-anticipated showdown with Sloane Stephens on Sunday while Li Na avenged a painful loss in Rome to join the world number one in the last eight.

Williams defeated US 15th seed Sloane Stephens 6-4, 6-1 to reach the US Open quarterfinals, winning eight of the last nine games in avenging a loss that ousted her from the 2013 Australian Open.

## Cox's Stadium named after Sheikh Kamal

SPORTS REPORTER

The cricket stadium at Cox's Bazar has been named Sheikh Kamal International Stadium, Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) officials informed yesterday.

The stadium, which is still under construction and is expected to host the women's T20 World Cup next year, will be visited by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina today who is going to lay the foundation stone in a ceremony to mark its official inauguration.

BCB president Nazmul Hassan Papon brought media personnel up to speed on the stadium's latest developments at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

He also said that there is a strong possibility of the current location of the stadium being a permanent one, as opposed to it making way for a five-star resort under a Civil Aviation and Tourism Industry project after the world cup next year.

"They (Civil Aviation and Tourism ministry members) had told us (in July) that they have another plan for that space. They had put up a proposal for us to shift the stadium to another place after the world cup. But I feel that we can come to an amicable solution," said Papon.

"The amount of money that is being spent here is substantial and even the locals are saying that they want the stadium to be permanent," he added.

He however stated that currently the BCB was focused on hosting the world cup and that a decision regarding the location of the venue would be taken following meetings on the issue.

"The PM is going to inaugurate the stadium tomorrow. After that they (Civil Aviation and Tourism ministry members) can sit with the PM and a decision can be reached. Our main focus right now is the world cup," said Papon.