

## Goalless draw at empty BNS

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangabandhu Gold Cup produced its first goalless draw yesterday as the six-nation tournament moved to the Bangabandhu National Stadium in Dhaka. Rank outsiders Singapore U-23 team held pretournament favourites Bahrain U-23 team in a match, which was marked by plenty of action, missed chances, goalkeeping howlers, goalline clearances and flailing tempers. However, the important thing missing was a goal. But there weren't too many people in attendance to lament that either. Bahrain had come into the tournament on the back of a fifth-place finish in the U-23 Gulf Cup but were still expected to roll over Singapore, who were beaten 3-2 by Thailand in Group B's opening fixture on Friday. However, Bahrain did not create enough clear-cut openings, especially in the first half, despite enjoying lion's share of possession.

At the other end, Taufik Suparno was the target of all Singapore's attacks, but the skilful striker wasn't quite wearing his shooting boots yesterday. Singapore goalie M Z bin Rohizad made two awful blunders in the second half, but his defenders rushed in with goalline to spare the keeper's blushes. Rohizad however later made an excellent block to keep his side in the tournament. The result leaves the Gulf nation with having to do it all over again in their last group match against table-toppers Thailand tomorrow while Singapore will be praying for a big win for the Thais so that they can join them in the last four.

## Marseille keep up pressure

AFP, Paris

A single point separates the top three teams in Ligue 1 after Marseille climbed back to second with a hard-fought 1-0 home win over plucky Evian on Saturday. The victory was secured when Andre-Pierre Gignac converted a penalty. Lyon are top on 48 points ahead of their clash with Monaco but Marseille and PSG are breathing down their necks on 47 points each.



Zahid Hossain (C) will hope Zahid Hasan Emily (R) and Jamal Bhuiyan will take a cue from his performance in the opening match when they take on Sri Lanka today. The Bangladesh players sweated it out at a practice session in Dhanmondi yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

# 'We'll go for the kill'

## Changes likely in Bangladesh starting eleven

SPORTS REPORTER



Even though a draw against Sri Lanka today will be good enough for Bangladesh to go through to the semifinals of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup, the hosts are looking forward to securing full points in this crucial match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium. Following the lacklustre defeat against Malaysia U-23 team in their opening fixture, Lodewijk de Kruij and his charges sounded eager to make amends and put on a strong display to ensure the last four berth. "A draw is enough for us indeed, but taking the field with an approach of playing for a draw is always difficult and dangerous. Our approach is to play well and win the match to go through the next round," said the Dutch coach at the pre-match briefing at the BFF House yesterday. The coach hinted that there might be two or three changes in the starting eleven from the one that played against Malaysia as the performances of striker Zahid Hasan Emily, winger Sohel Rana, midfielder Jamal Bhuiyan and defenders Yeamin Munna, Atiqur Rahman Meshu and goalkeeper Rasel Mahmud Liton have been criticised. De Kruij tried some other players in those positions but he is expected to make a wholesale change to the eleven. There are plenty of positives on the background

to validate de Kruij's statement. Bangladesh are ahead of the Lankans both on head-to-head count and FIFA ranking while playing on homeground with a three-day rest should put the hosts at an advantageous position. Skipper Mamunul Islam believes they are prepared for Sri Lanka's challenge. "We need three points and all 23 players are fit and ready to give hundred per cent. We are focused on securing full points rather than putting up a good show because end the result is all that matters," said the 27-year-old skipper. Mamunul and his teammates, along with the coaching staff, watched the Sri Lanka versus Malaysia match and were supposed to analyse the aspects of that match during practice session. The Sri Lankans, on the other hand, are still trying to transfer the pressure by saying that their focus is more on preparing for the World Cup pre-qualifiers rather than the outcome of this tournament. Coach Nikola Kavazovic however warned that his changes would be trying to capitalise on the opportunities in counter attack, something he felt his side failed to do against Malaysia. "Though the players are tired after the domestic league, there is no lack of motivation about beating the home side. My boys will not play slowly in the middle as Sri Lankans never surrender without a fight," said Kavazovic, whose side did give the Malaysians a hard time before going down 0-2.



Lodewijk de Kruij (R) shakes hands with his counterpart Nikola Kavazovic at a press briefing at the BFF House yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

## Juve, Roma stutter

AFP, Milan

Roma's hopes of a first Serie A title faded further on Saturday after a fourth consecutive draw, 1-1 at home to Empoli, to leave Juventus seven points clear after the Old Lady's trip to Udinese ended in a 0-0 draw. Inter Milan's Champions League qualification hopes were kept in check by a 3-1 defeat away to Sassuolo on Sunday when both sides finished with 10 men. Sassuolo moved up four places to eighth to sit two points ahead of Inter, who dropped one place to 12th at 24 points behind leaders Juventus. Italy striker Simone Zaza opened the scoring for the hosts and they doubled their lead when Nicola Sansone fired an unstoppable shot from a difficult angle in off the underside of the crossbar. Mauro Icardi pounced on a poor back pass by Francesco Magnanelli to round Andrea Consigli and fire into an empty net. Berardi then stepped up to beat Handanovic from the spot to seal the win.

# The weight of history

SPORTS REPORTER



When Bangladesh take on Sri Lanka in today's crucial fixture of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup, the habit of collapsing under pressure may come in their way of making it to the last four. In the last 15 years, Bangladesh buckled under pressure in four major tournaments -- the AFC Challenge Cup finals in 2010, the SAFF Championships in 2011 and 2013 and the Asian Games in 2014 -- where they needed victories to go to the next stage, but suffered defeats in all four occasions to exit from the group stages. In the Asian Games in South Korea last year, Bangladesh made a brilliant start by beating Afghanistan 1-0 before losing to Uzbekistan 0-3, leaving them with a must-win situation in group's last match against Hong Kong. However, they lost the match 1-2 and spurned the chance of qualifying for the second round for the first time. The same group of booters also disappointed in the 2013 SAFF Championship in Nepal where they had a bad start losing against Nepal 0-1 before holding India to a 1-1 draw to keep semifinal hopes alive. However, despite taking the lead against Pakistan in the next match, they conceded a 1-2 defeat to exit from the group stages. Two years earlier in the same tournament in India, Bangladesh had endured the same fate as they suffered a 1-3 defeat against Maldives in the last group match to be eliminated.

The predecessors of these booters were not too exceptional when it came to buckling under pressure. After a historic 2-1 win over Tajikistan, Bangladesh needed a victory in their third and last match to ensure the semifinals of the AFC Challenge Cup finals. But they conceded a 0-3 defeat to Sri Lanka, the opponents of today's match, to spurn a glorious opportunity. However, there is one instance from which today's booters can take heart. The likes of Jewel Rana, Arman Mia, Masud Rana and Alfaz Ahmed overcame such pressure situation to beat Sri Lanka 1-0 in the last group match of 1999 SAF Games before clinching the title by beating Nepal 1-0 in final. Sheikh Jamal DC coach Maruful Haque is hopeful that the Bangladesh team, most of whom he had coached at club level, overcome the pressure. "I saw matches of both teams. I think Bangladesh can post a win over Sri Lanka if they can play their natural game. However, they must hold their nerve at all times," opined Maruful.

**TODAY'S MATCH**

BANGLADESH (165) **V** SRI LANKA (172)

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**HEAD-TO-HEAD RECORD**

**MATCHES: 14**

BANGLADESH WON: **9**

SRI LANKA WON: **3**

DRAWN: **2**

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What we need is the support from whole nation to play good football tomorrow (Monday) to find a way to next round. It is a prestigious tournament and we will try to move as far as we can.

--- Lodewijk de Kruij, Bangladesh coach

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There were 10 strategies against Bangladesh during the two friendly matches but this time there is only one strategy and that is to win the match.

--- Nikola Kavazovic, Sri Lanka coach

# Five-star Gunners

AFP, London



Arsenal stepped up their renewed challenge for a top four place in the Premier League with a ruthless 5-0 demolition of struggling Aston Villa on Sunday. Arsene Wenger's side moved above Tottenham into fifth place and within touching distance of fourth-placed Southampton in the race to qualify for the Champions League thanks to their biggest win of the season. Olivier Giroud opened the scoring early in the first half at the Emirates Stadium and Mesut Ozil, Theo Walcott, Santi Cazorla and Hector Bellerin struck after the interval to seal Arsenal's fifth successive win in all competitions.



Arsenal striker Olivier Giroud chips Aston Villa's Brad Guzan to score the opening goal of their match at the Emirates Stadium yesterday.

After their impressive victory at champions Manchester City last month, this was more evidence that Arsenal, who were able to leave new Brazilian defender Gabriel Paulista as an unused substitute, are finally hitting their stride after a spluttering first half of the season. In contrast, woeful Villa are hovering three points above the relegation zone after a third successive league defeat and the pressure will increase on boss Paul Lambert, whose side have now gone 10 hours and six matches since their last league goal in December. That offensive futility piled unbearable pressure on Villa's defence and they were unable to withstand a blistering start from the Gunners, who showed no signs of being hamstrung by the absence of injured Chile winger Alexis Sanchez.

## Jose keeps irking FA

THE GUARDIAN

The Premier League is likely to punish Jose Mourinho after he maintained his silence by failing to fulfil his media duties before or after Chelsea's 1-1 draw with Manchester City. It follows Mourinho cancelling his pre-match conference on Friday after he was fined £25,000 by the FA for alleging there is a "campaign" against Chelsea in the aftermath of the 1-1 draw with Southampton on 28 December. Premier League rules state managers must speak to rights holders the day before the game and the league will seek an explanation from Chelsea. Mourinho felt Costa was unfairly targeted by Sky and he refused to speak to the broadcaster before kick-off against City. There was also no representative from Chelsea for the post-match press conference. The Premier League is already investigating why Mourinho sent his deputy to carry out his press duties before last month's game against Newcastle and this latest incident is likely to lead to a fine.

# 'I am not an angel'

AFP, London



Chelsea striker Diego Costa accepted he was "no angel" but insisted he had not done anything wrong in the incident that led to him receiving a three-match ban. The 26-year-old was suspended for three games by the Football Association, after being found guilty of violent conduct when it was ruled he had deliberately stamped on the ankle of Liverpool's Emre Can during Chelsea's League Cup semi-final leg victory on Tuesday. Costa, who was hit with an immediate three-game ban by the FA on Friday and so missed Premier League leaders Chelsea's 1-1 draw with second-placed champions Manchester City on Saturday, said he accepted the punishment, but he insisted he did not mean to injure Can. "As far as what happened on Tuesday, the main thing is when I get home I can go to sleep knowing that I've not done anything wrong, because I never meant to do that and it was not on purpose," he told Britain's Daily Telegraph newspaper. "And you can clearly see that on the video. But it is a suspension. Obviously I feel sad because I'm not going to be able to help the team, to play. But I have accept it and respect it." The Brazil-born forward added: "I'm not saying I'm an angel. I'm not an angel. You can see that. "But every time I play I will play the same



way because that's how I am. "That's what I need to do in order to support my family. That's my bread and butter. Also, that's what I need to do for this club, for the fans and for all the people involved in this club. "On the pitch I will always be like that. That's my character and I will always compete and compete -- always. I'm a different guy off the pitch, as but on the pitch I will not change. Costa and Chelsea have no right of appeal, which means that, as well as the Manchester City match, he will also miss the upcoming fixtures with Aston Villa and Everton. The likes of former Manchester United and England full-back Gary Neville have praised Costa as a throw-back to the days of the centre-forward once common in English football. Costa himself said he regretted how football had become a less physical game but the former Atletico Madrid front man insisted he would not change his approach. "I'm always loyal, I always go 100 percent, I always go on the limit but I think the people that think that I am a violent player, it's because they interpret football a different way," he said. "Back in the old days there used to be way more contact and a lot of things that were permitted. These days everyone is looking at it and I don't think that is good for the game," Costa added. "I have a go at defenders and they have a go at me. We argue. Whatever happens on the pitch stays on the pitch."

## Dortmund hit bottom again

AFP, Berlin

Borussia Dortmund slipped back to the bottom of the Bundesliga on Saturday despite picking up a point in their goalless draw at fellow Champions League side Bayer Leverkusen. Before kick-off, Freiburg's 4-1 comeback win at home to Eintracht Frankfurt had lifted Christian Streich's side up to 13th to send Dortmund bottom for the first time since November. But Jurgen Klopp's Dortmund failed to break the hosts' defence at Leverkusen's BayArena as Borussia's Italian striker Ciro Immobile squandered a string of second-half chances. At the other end, Borussia's Germany defender Mats Hummels headed Gonzalo Castro's first-half shot off the line in the hosts' best chance after Castro had earlier shot over the bar. With ten defeats in 18 games, Klopp's side are enduring their worst start to a league season in 30 years. They are looking to avoid dropping out of the Bundesliga for the first time since 1976, while Bayer are fifth.