

A derby detached and disowned

Abahani, MSC battle in Gopalganj today

SPORTS REPORTER

The word derby bears special significance on a sporting field. The Manchester derby, the Milan derby, the Madrid derby and many other sporting clashes have been cherished across the football world for ages. Actually a derby is a unique identity in every footballing nation. Bangladesh was once proud of its own derby on a football field, which was as popular and intensely followed as any other derby in the world. That derby still returns on paper every year. But unfortunately the first letter of the derby nowadays stands for detached and disowned -- detached from a once-vibrant soul and disowned perhaps by its officials. We will have our latest derby -- a Mohammedan-Abahani clash -- at the famous Sheikh Fazlul Haque Moni Stadium today. To be honest it would have passed unnoticed had it not been advertised by the media, which is still playing a forceful role in an apparent attempt to revive that glorious battle -- not just a mere clash on the field but the most important social phenomenon over a course of three decades. That social phenomenon has now been

bracketed into just statistic. Interestingly, the most intriguing statistics is that this battle will in no way decide where the league will be heading this year, which had been the case from early 70s to early 90s. While Abahani is leading the pack with 37 points from 17 games, their bitter rivals Mohammedan are struggling to avoid the ignominy of being relegated with 17 points from as many games. That is still acceptable because world football has seen a lot of ups and downs for big clubs. But the most disturbing disclosure of this rivalry is the sense of belonging or the lack of it from the club officials, especially from the Mohammed ranks. Accountability of the collective consciousness, passion for its glorious legacy and commitment to its millions of followers is the missing cue. We will have another important sporting engagement on the same day in the form of two playoff games of the Bangladesh Premier League Twenty20 at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur. And we can expect a full house for those cricketing contests designed more for fun than a serious sense of belonging. Don't get amused if you see the top officials of both Mohammedan and Abahani skip a trip to Gopalganj, instead enjoying the game of cricket, leaving the once all consum-

Blatter loses CAS appeal

AFP, Lausanne

The Court of Arbitration for Sport said Monday that Sepp Blatter breached FIFA's ethics codes as it firmly rejected his appeal against a six year ban for making a \$2 million payment to ousted UEFA chief Michel Platini. "Mr Blatter breached the FIFA Code of Ethics since the payment amounted to an undue gift as it had no contractual basis," said the CAS in a statement which said Blatter's appeal had been "dismissed."

'We practised diving in Argentina'

AFP, London

Tottenham boss Mauricio Pochettino defended midfielder Dele Alli from accusations of diving and revealed that when he was a youngster in Argentina, he and teammates even practised diving to win penalties. Alli was widely lambasted for his theatrical fall that won Spurs a first-half penalty in their 5-0 rout of Swansea at White Hart Lane on Saturday. Harry Kane converted the spot-kick. But on Sunday, Pochettino explained how when he came through the ranks at Newell's Old Boys in his native Argentina they even used to practise diving in training. "In Argentina, yes, the people sometimes practise that, it's true," Pochettino said.



Napoli stars Jose Maria Callejon (L) and Marek Hamsik (2nd from L) attend a training session in Naples yesterday on the eve of their Champions League match against Benfica.

PHOTO: AFP

Trio battle for last 16 spots

AFP, Paris



As Paris Saint-Germain joust with Arsenal for top spot in their group, Napoli, Benfica and Besiktas will battle it out Tuesday for last 16 Champions League slots. The Group B trio all have everything to play for in their final pool games as the only one of the eight first phase groups where no side has yet secured a berth. Portugal's Benfica, European champions back in 1961 and 1962 in their halcyon days but who have under-achieved since, should have secured their passage on matchday five but threw away a three-goal lead at Besiktas. That Turkish comeback, rekindling memories of Liverpool's historic 2005 Istanbul triumph, has left the group outcome on a knife-edge with Besiktas knowing that a win at eliminated Dynamo Kiev will send them through.

In contrast, the final round of games pits Benfica against a Napoli side who beat them 4-2 back on matchday two in Italy -- while Besiktas were dropping home points against Kiev. The Turkish side's subsequent win in Italy threw the group wide open and the 14-time national champions' refusal to

concern Sunday about the weather in Kiev predicting that sub-zero temperatures and snow could spell "danger". The paper added Aras Ozbiliz, Anderson Talisca and Caner Erkin are on the treatment table and set to miss out. The winner of Benfica-Napoli in Lisbon will qualify as group winners, while a draw would be enough to send the latter through given their head-to-head edge. If Besiktas lose, both will progress regardless. Whereas Benfica warmed up for the game by losing their unbeaten record in Portugal in slumping to unheralded Maritimo at the weekend, Napoli broke back into the top four in Serie A when Slovakia midfielder Marek Hamsik moved to within 11 goals of Diego Maradona's record haul of 115 goals for the club after scoring in Friday's 3-0 romp over Inter Milan. "As far as we're concerned, we have to go there looking for the win," said Napoli coach Maurizio Sarri.

FIXTURES

(all 1945 GMT):
Basel v Arsenal, Paris SG v Ludogorets, Benfica v Napoli, Dynamo Kiev v Besiktas, Manchester City v Celtic, Barcelona v Borussia Moenchengladbach, Bayern Munich v Atletico Madrid, PSV Eindhoven v Rostov

surrender against Benfica means they now fancy their chances. Besiktas will hope that their best previous showing -- a 1987 European Cup quarter-final appearance -- will not prove a poor omen. Back then, they lost 7-0 on aggregate -- to Kiev. Turkish daily Sabah expressed



Message from the Embassy of Finland



Embassy of Finland takes great pleasure to greet the people of Bangladesh on the 99th Anniversary of the Finnish Independence. We Finns take pride in the stability and wellbeing of our native land. For us Finns, the Independence Day is a combination of joy and solemnity at the same time, a day of mixed emotions. The way to prosperity has not been easy. Finland, a member of European Union, became independent in 1917.

We are proud of being at the top of many international research and measurement lists: Finland is top 5 country on the WEF 2016 Global Innovation Index, our educational system is among the best in the world; we are among the least corrupted countries in the world; the activities of Finnish authorities are considered to be transparent and trustworthy.

Independence Day celebrations for us are a combination of joy and solemnity. On the Independence Day the custom is to thank and pay tribute to those who have served the country, made sacrifices and contributed for the common good. We have patriotic speeches, visits to cemeteries, tributes at war memorials and special church services. On a lighter note, people place blue and white candles in their windows, bakeries sell blue and white pastries and there are blue and white flags on display everywhere. Throughout the history, the Finns have learned how to find room for consensus and cooperation. A severe economic recession hit the country in the early 1990's but the outcome was a more competitive economy and a society strongly based on knowledge. Today, Finland, a member of European Union since 1995 is among the most developed countries in the world. Yet again, we are facing new global threats, which we have to address together with other nations, such as economic downturn or climate change. We believe global challenges can be turned into opportunities, as we have done in the past. Here international cooperation plays a key role.

Therefore Finland believes in economic cooperation combined with promotion of human rights, democracy, the rule of law, and sustainable development. We continue working together for these goals with the Bangladesh Government and our other partners all over the world. I'm very pleased to say that the bilateral relations between Bangladesh and Finland have been traditionally good. The main focus of our relations is on trade, which has shown an upward trend in recent years. Yet there are still many opportunities to be tapped in the trade and economic front. An increase in trade and investment relations would be mutually beneficial, and should be pursued together.

Finland is represented in Bangladesh by Honorary Consulate General and I convey my best wishes to Honorary Consul General Muhammed Aziz Khan and his experienced team in fulfilling their duties and in promoting our relations in such a wonderful manner. My sincere hope is that we can continue excellent cooperation and extend it to the new areas in coming years.

Mrs. Nina Vaskunlahti, Ambassador

Message Honorary Consul General



Congratulations to the people of Finland and the citizens of Finland who reside in Bangladesh on this 99th Independence Day of Finland. I am honored to be the Honorary Consul General and be part of this glorious day. The good relations between our two countries are founded on our shared values of humanity and peace. Our embassy located in Delhi is continually supporting us in these and other developments.

The relentless entrepreneurship of the people of Finland is an inspiration for Bangladesh. The hard working people of Finland and Bangladesh share many common values. The consulate here will endeavor to improve the already existing ties of commerce, industry and culture. Finland's companies have provided much needed support to Bangladesh for her energy, security and construction.

As all of us in Bangladesh, around the world and in Finland celebrate this Independence Day, I wish all the Finnish people peace, prosperity and happiness.

Muhammed Aziz Khan, Honorary Consul General

Heartiest Felicitations on the National Day of FINLAND! We wish the people of Finland much joy, and success. Since our establishment in 1910, in Helsinki we have proudly been contributing to the development of Finland and now we are equally proud to be able to contribute to the ongoing development of Bangladesh.

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- Supplying LIFTS to the world's TALLEST BUILDING (Kingdom Tower, 1 km high)
- Ranked as the most innovative LIFT company in the world by Forbes magazine for 6 consecutive years

Congratulations

We wish a colorful celebration of 99th National Day of Finland

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