

# BD women take on Afghanistan today

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh women's football team will be hoping to confirm their semifinal berth in the 4th S A F F W o m e n ' s Championship as they take on Afghanistan in their first Group B match at the Kanchenjunga Stadium in Siliguri today.

Bangladesh are regarded as favourites against the Afghans whom they beat 6-1 in their last meeting during the 2014 SAFF Women's Championship in Islamabad. The fact that Afghanistan have already lost their opening match against India by 5-1 goals makes the equation for Bangladesh fairly simple – win the game and qualify for the last four.

Bangladesh will face three-time defending champions India in their second group match on Saturday.

Afghanistan, however, are believed to be a much improved side in recent times due to the inclusion of a number of overseas-based players. The Afghans are seemingly taking this championship very seriously as they arrived in India a week ahead of their first match to get used to with the chilly weather of Siliguri.

Bangladesh coach Golam Rabbani Choton admitted this while talking to reporters.

"We have watched the match between

India and Afghanistan and it seemed that Afghanistan are a strong side this time because they have included many players who play in different European countries. There is huge a difference between this team and the one that played in the 2014 SAFF Championship," Choton said on the eve of the game, which is scheduled to get underway at 6:30pm today.

The Bangladesh team are mostly comprised of players from the under-16 squad with only four players including two goalkeepers being seniors. The charges of Choton have been preparing for the championship since late September even though the senior players joined the camp in early November.

"We don't want to give any room to Afghanistan as we will take to the field for a victory and play all out. The girls are hundred percent ready to give their best. I believe they will leave the field with a victory," said Choton.

The women in red and whites have apparently coped up with the weather of Siliguri after spending two days there.

Captain Sabina Khatun is upbeat about making a winning start even though she is a bit cautious as well.

"India won the match but Afghanistan are a good side, who have two quality forwards and we will have special plan for those two players. However, I believe we can beat them to confirm the semifinal berth," said the 23-year-old captain, who has been representing Bangladesh since 2009.



Bangladesh players pose for photographs at Siliguri's Teesta Stadium yesterday on the eve of their SAFF Women's Championship fixture against Afghanistan.

PHOTO: BFF

## BFF plans tourney for district youth

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The Development Committee of the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) is mulling to hold a tournament with budding footballers after completing a talent hunt programme financed by the National Sports Council (NSC).

The development committee has already completed the third-phase of the programme across nearly 300 upazilas of 42 districts. The programme has been designed to train players at upazilla level for at least five days.

"The BFF executive committee has approved the fourth and final phase of the talent hunt programme and we are planning to hold a tournament with 42 districts as we have already selected 20 players from each district. We are, though, yet to finalise the structure of the tournament. We want to give each of the district team at least three competitive matches," said development committee chairman Badal Roy.

The NSC is financing a total 30 national federations to conduct talent hunt programmes at grass-roots level and BFF has been allocated Tk 1.11 crore for the programme.

## Gascoigne hospitalised

AFP, London

Former England star Paul Gascoigne was hospitalised after an alcohol-fuelled altercation at a London hotel, British media reported on Wednesday.

Gascoigne, 49, was accused of "racially abusing" fellow customers, groping women and throwing money around, witnesses said.

London's Metropolitan Police said officers were called to a disturbance at the Ace Hotel in east London on Tuesday evening and a 49-year-old man was taken to hospital with a head injury.

Gascoigne's spokesman Terry Baker told the Daily Mirror: "He hasn't been arrested. He's about to be released and sent home."

Police said the former Tottenham Hotspur and England midfielder was in a "stable condition" in hospital and inquiries were ongoing.

## Klopp relishes City clash

AFP, Liverpool



Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp is looking forward to pitting his wits against Pep Guardiola again after seeing the Reds fight back to beat Stoke City 4-1 in the Premier League on Tuesday.

The Reds moved back above Manchester City into second place in the table, and to within six points of leaders Chelsea, after claiming their third consecutive win and maintaining their unbeaten record at Anfield this season.

The win, secured thanks to goals by Adam Lallana, Roberto Firmino, Daniel Sturridge and a Giannelli Imbula own goal, set Liverpool up nicely for their New Year's Eve home clash with City, whose manager was in the Anfield crowd doing a spot of scouting.

"I'm not sure whether he watched a lot of games in the last few weeks in other stadiums. That is the first sign it is a special game and we are already looking forward to it," Klopp said.

The German -- a direct rival of Guardiola's when the pair were in charge of Borussia Dortmund and Bayern Munich respectively -- admitted that it can be difficult to go to see opposition

teams in action these days because the Premier League's superstar managers risk spending more time signing autographs than actually watching games.

"I respect them a lot also but I have not been at their stadium this season. Maybe he just wants to watch good football," he joked.

"It's a difficult game for both teams but exciting and the best thing is it's at Anfield. They are an outstanding side and we are not too bad."

Liverpool have won eight and drawn two of 10 games at Anfield this season and have not been beaten in front of their own fans in 23 games going back to January.

City can therefore expect to face a daunting task but Stoke -- the last visiting team to win at Anfield -- looked like they could spring a surprise after Jonathan Walters put them in front in the 12th minute.

Lallana equalised and Firmino's fine strike just before half-time made it 2-1 before Liverpool ran away with the game in the second period.

The Brazilian's goal, his sixth of the season, came three days after he was arrested and charged for drink driving in the centre of Liverpool, and Klopp said there had been no prospect of the

player being dropped.

"No because he was the best man in training so there was no chance to leave him out. No chance. He was outstanding," he said.

There were important contributions from Sadio Mane, who forced Imbula into turning the ball into his own net, and Sturridge, who came off the bench and seconds later had his first goal of the season.

Captain Jordan Henderson was also excellent, but Klopp said it was "not the moment" to shower praise on individuals.

"I don't think they need it. In this moment they are all happy about the team performance, the result, about the goals we scored," he said.

"If we speak about one player we speak always about the past but I already think about the next game and hopefully we can do better."

Stoke boss Mark Hughes has still never won at Anfield as a manager and he was left to rue defensive errors that contributed to his team's downfall.

"We deservedly took the lead. The disappointment is that we allowed them back into the game just before half-time. We went in 2-1 down feeling a little bit hard done by," said Hughes.

## Swansea sack Bradley

AFP, Swansea

Premier League strugglers Swansea City dismissed coach Bob Bradley on Tuesday after just 11 games in charge, the club announced.

American Bradley replaced Francesco Guidolin in October but the Swans have won just twice following his appointment and lie second from bottom in the table.

"Swansea City can confirm that the club has parted company with manager Bob Bradley," the Welsh side said in a statement.

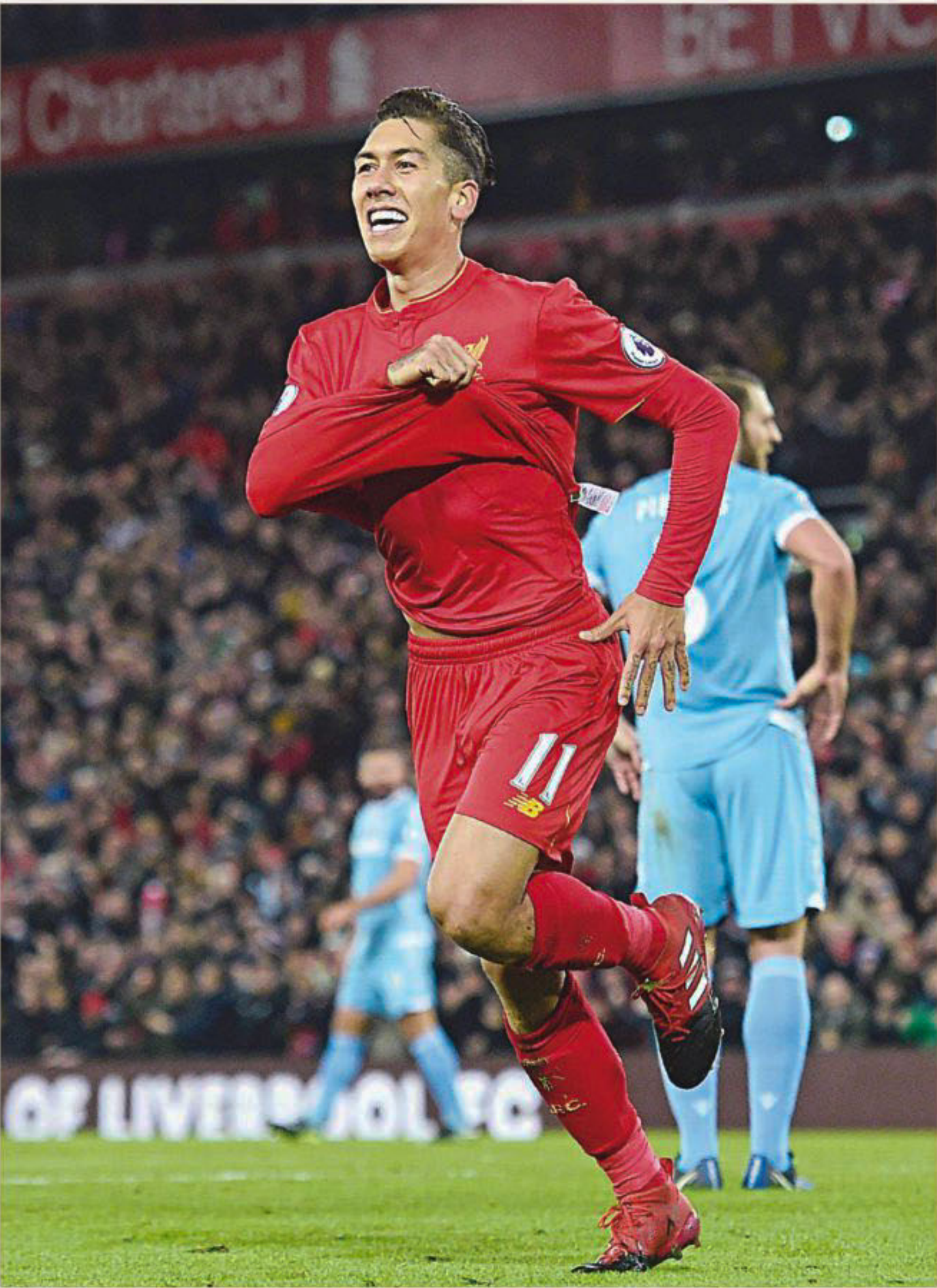
His departure comes a day after Swansea were thumped 4-1 at home by West Ham, the club's seventh defeat in Bradley's short-lived tenure.

"I knew exactly what I was getting into when I came to Swansea and realised the hardest part was always going to be getting points in the short run," Bradley told US broadcaster NBC Sports.

"But I believe in myself and I believe in going for it. That's what I've always told my players.

"Football can be cruel and to have a chance you have to be strong."

"I wish Swansea the best and look forward to my next challenge."



Liverpool forward Roberto Firmino celebrates after scoring the second goal against Stoke City during their Premier League encounter at Anfield on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Volleyball plans to cash in on success

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh Volleyball Federation (BVF) is keen to cash in on the success of the national team, which delivered its first-ever international trophy by winning the Bangabandhu Asian Senior Men's Central Zone International Volleyball Championship on Tuesday.

Sayed Al Zahir, Horosit Biswas, Rashed Khan Emon, Sohel Rana, Emdadul Haque, Imran Haider and Masud Hossain were the remarkable performers for the hosts, who outclassed Nepal after 19 years and defeated mighty Kyrgyzstan for the first time.

The executive committee of the game's governing body yesterday sat in a meeting to discuss about the future plans to revive volleyball which once used to be a very popular game across the country.

"We have discussed about the just concluded international tournament and current state of volleyball. We have to go forward by identifying our lacking. Our main task will be to prepare a calendar and put emphasis on district and school volleyball," BVF president Atiqul Islam told reporters.

"We have to pick up potential players from these meets. We need to make a strong pipeline for the national team," Islam said. "We now want to emphasise on the under-19 team, which is supposed to take part in the Asian Cup Qualifying in Myanmar, keeping in mind that these players will form the future national team."

The BVF president informed that they are mulling to hold a franchise-based volleyball league in near future by involving different corporate houses as they have got positive response from the sponsors who were involved in the just concluded tournament.

Meanwhile, since clinching the trophy on Tuesday evening, the Bangladesh players have been spending busy times and enjoying moments with their fans, friends and relatives.

"We are having a wonderful time," said captain Zahir. "I think this can be the turning point for volleyball and the federation should come up with a long-term plan to produce players for future."

"Experience is vital in volleyball and I think if we are given more opportunities to play international matches, we will



Fernando Santos (L) receives the best coach award.

## Ronaldo, Santos honoured

AFP, Dubai



Real Madrid star Cristiano Ronaldo and Portugal's Euro 2016-winning coach Fernando Santos scooped the top prizes at the seventh edition of the Globe Soccer Awards in Dubai on Tuesday.

Ronaldo claimed the best player award after helping his country land their first major title at this year's European Championship and firing Real to a record 11th European Cup triumph.

"Probably (this) was my best year so far," Ronaldo, who earlier this month won the Ballon d'Or for the fourth time in his career, said in a short video message.

"The people still doubt about me, about Real Madrid, about national team, and you have the proof. We win everything, so amazing year, I'm so happy."

The 62-year-old Santos was named best manager after masterminding Portugal's success in France, while Champions League winners Real Madrid took home the prize for club of the year.

Paris Saint-Germain coach Unai Emery, under pressure at the Parc des Princes following a mediocre first half of the season, also received an award having led Sevilla to a third straight Europa League crown before leaving for France.

## Tevez burgled in Uruguay

AFP, Buenos Aires

Thieves robbed the Buenos Aires home of Argentine striker Carlos Tevez while the Boca Juniors star was in Uruguay celebrating his wedding, police sources revealed on Tuesday.

The value of the stolen items has yet to be disclosed, as the former Manchester City and Manchester United forward had still to file an official complaint.

Tevez married the mother of his three children, Vanesa Mansilla, last Thursday in front of more than 200 guests at a ceremony on the banks of the Rio de la Plata.

But he discovered the break-in on Sunday when he returned to his house in the affluent San Isidro neighbourhood on the outskirts of the Argentine capital.

The thieves purportedly gained access to his home through a building site on an adjoining property.

The 32-year-old is expected to finalize a transfer to Chinese Super League side Shanghai Shenhua this week, reportedly set to pocket 40 million euros (\$41.6m) a season -- 20 times what he currently earns at Boca Juniors.