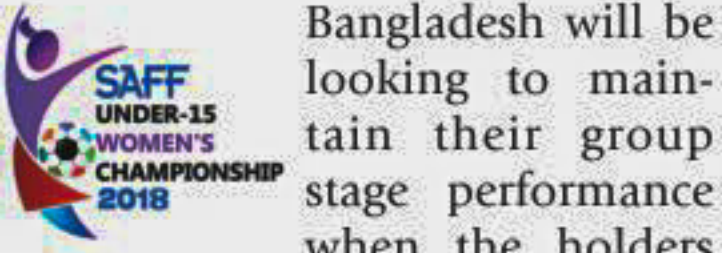


Girls up against improved Bhutan

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh will be looking to maintain their group stage performance when the holders take on hosts Bhutan in the semifinals of the SAFF U-15 Women's Championship at the Changlimithang Stadium in Thimphu today.

The match will get underway at 7:00pm (BST) after India take on Nepal in the first semifinal at the same venue.

The girls in red and green stormed into the semifinals with wins over Pakistan and Nepal in the group stage, finding the back of the net 17 times and sending a strong message that they were once again the team to beat in the second edition of the regional football championship.

The defending champions are now up against an improving Bhutan, who impressed with their organised performances which culminated in the hosts recording their first-ever win at this level with a 6-0 demolition of Sri Lanka before a narrow 1-0 defeat to India in their group stage matches.

Both results were evidence of Bhutan's improvement. The Bhutanese girls were beaten 15-0 by Bangladesh in the now-defunct AFC U-14 Girls Regional (South and Central) Championships in



Nilufer Yasmin (C), Shamsunnahar Jr (L) and Rozina Akhter are seen in action during the Bangladesh Under-15 team's practice session yesterday at the Changlimithang Stadium in Thimphu on the eve of their semifinal against Bhutan.

PHOTO: BFF

2015, but the Himalayan nation groomed their girls over the following two years and were on the receiving end of a relatively tame 3-0 loss to Bangladesh in the inaugural SAFF U-15 Women's Championship in December 2017.

Seven months on, Bhutan are considered good opponents for Bangladesh in the last four-battle, especially in front of a home

crowd and in a familiar environment.

However, Bangladesh are not really worried by Bhutan's improvement. Instead they just want to play with their utmost effort to ensure a final berth.

"We have achieved our preliminary target by confirming the semifinal berth. Now we are one win away from the final. The target in the semifinal is to put up our

natural show like we did in the two group matches. The girls will take the field for the victory and give hundred per cent effort to win the match against Bhutan," said head coach Golam Rabanni Choton over the phone before conducting his final training session yesterday.

Bangladesh asserted their authority and dominated Pakistan and Nepal in the group matches with everyone from forwards to

defenders on the scoresheet, but Nepal gave them a hard time and nearly held their opponents until half time.

Bhutan, considered a better side than Nepal, can also give their superior opponents a run for their money by taking advantage of their physical condition, the backing of the home crowd and familiar weather.

"Yes, Bhutan came to the semifinal with good performances. They are now a better side than they were seven months ago. But you have to remember that Bangladesh have also improved over the past seven months. So we are not thinking much of Bhutan; rather we want to play our own game," said Choton, adding that although Bhutan had the home advantage, his girls were habituated to playing in such environments.

The Bangladesh backline and goalkeeper were hardly tested in the group matches as brilliant midfielders Maria Manda and Monica Chakma pulled the strings from the middle, providing the final passes and breaking up opposition attacks to reduce pressure on the defence.

However, it is uncertain whether Monica can take the field against Bhutan after picking up a thigh injury in the match against Nepal although Choton is optimistic about her chances.

Has the BPL shot itself in the foot?

MAZHAR UDDIN



After the mismanagement in the first two editions, the Bangladesh Premier League [BPL] had just begun to get organised and gain popularity worldwide over the past three editions.

Once again, however, as had happened in the first two editions marred by the fixing and non-payment clouds, the shift in slot from November to January due to the upcoming national elections is threatening the franchise-based tournament's value.

The BPL governing council has already announced that the sixth edition of the tournament will take place from January 5, 2019 but they were willing to return to the regular November slot for the next edition and wanted to stage two editions of the tournament in 2019.

But the franchise owners declined the proposal for November 2019, citing financial complications attached to staging two events in the same year, thus forcing the governing council to shift the seventh edition of the BPL to March 2020. The shift in slot has already created a few technical problems for the governing council, namely the uncertainty it will cause for foreign players in an already congested international calendar.

The sixth edition of the BPL, which is set to end in February 8 next year, will directly clash with the Australian Big Bash League (BBL) which begins on December 1 and concludes on February 17.

According to sources with knowledge of the issue, Afghanistan cricketers like Rashid Khan, Mohammad Nabi and Mujeeb Ur Rahman who have been regulars in the BPL over the past few editions, prefer to play the Big Bash League in Australia ahead of the BPL in the upcoming edition.

Apart from Afghanistan, Zimbabwe and Bangladesh, all other Test teams will be busy with national commitments as per the Future Tours Programme (FTP) during January-February next year.

Australia will host India in December-January, which will be followed by a Sri Lankan trip down under for a two-match Test series from the last week of January. New Zealand will host India for a five-ODI series after the latter complete their Australia assignment.

West Indies will host England for three Tests, five ODIs and three T20Is from January while Pakistan will tour South Africa during that period for the same set of matches. Meanwhile, the Global T20 League in South Africa -- a new tournament also scheduled in November -- will certainly gain ground over their time-slot competitors.

"As you know we wanted to host two editions of the tournament in the same year but the franchises denied the proposal because of budget and other aspects. We also have the ICC Test Championship coming up so we have to keep that in mind. We will try to adjust the time slot gradually to return to our popular slot, which is November, but for that both governing council and the franchise owners have to come to an agreement," Jalal Yunus, chairman of the Bangladesh Cricket Board's media committee told The Daily Star yesterday.

There is a precedent for the BPL's current predicament, and it came in a tournament that the Bangladeshi version aspires to. In its second edition in 2009, the Indian Premier League could not be held during its usual time slot because of elections in the country, but instead of shifting the time slot, the Indian board took the decision to hold the tournament in South Africa, thus maintaining the interest and player availability.

That may have raised costs, but in the long term it proved beneficial because it upheld the quality of the IPL. As such tournaments draw a lot of value from the foreign stars, the BPL and the franchise owners may have shot themselves in the foot just after starting to gain some credibility.

BD A-IRE A second T20 washed out

SPORTS REPORTER

The second game of the three-match T20 series between Bangladesh A and Ireland A was abandoned due to rain without a single ball being bowled in Dublin yesterday.

The match will take place again today. Bangladesh A won the first match by four wickets riding on Soumya Sarkar's half century to lead the series 1-0.

Stead named new NZ coach

AFP, Wellington

New Zealand Cricket appointed former Test batsman Gary Stead as the new Black Caps coach Wednesday, with pundits describing him as a steady pair of hands to replace predecessor Mike Hesson.

Who wants to be a billionaire?



ATIQUJE ANAM from Jakarta



Have you ever had the dream of becoming a billionaire, and to your dismay, found out that there is hardly any chance of making your dream come true despite working your socks off? If so, come to Indonesia, for there are hundreds of thousands of billionaires here; and they are ordinary people, like you and me.

How so? Well, it is the massive inflation and a steady decline in the value of Indonesian rupiah that has apparently made almost every other person here a billionaire.

Things started going south for the rupiah during the Asian financial crisis of 1997, which hit most of the East Asian countries hard, taking an especially heavy toll on the economy and currency of Indonesia.

The decade-long crisis resulted in the rupiah losing value more



than six-fold against the US dollar, with one dollar currently equivalent to 14,600 rupiahs. To ease monetary transactions, the central bank has phased out small currency bills such as of 100 and 500 rupiah denominations, but there seems to be no end to the currency's continuous slide. If one has to buy a bus ticket or even a pack of chips, he or she needs to deal in tens of thousands of rupiahs.

So, if you do want to turn into an overnight billionaire, hurry to Indonesia, but just make sure you

bring a wallet fat enough to carry all those massive currency bills.

KING OF THE ROADS

Indonesians seem to have an obsession with motorcycles. There are all sorts of transportation modes available -- buses, metro, taxis, trains, tuktuks, human haulers, etc. -- but one that rules the roost is the bikes. Bikes are so much in vogue that you would even find small children dressed in school attire -- both boys and girls -- riding a motorcycle or a scooter to their destination (of course without

a valid driver's license).

This obsession with bikes has perhaps been borne out of necessity more than anything else because traffic here is notorious and not everyone can afford to hire taxis, let alone own cars.

And to tap into this enormous market, ride hailing companies have sprung up quite some time before Uber or Pathao came to Bangladesh. Go-Jek is one such company that has become a business giant on a global scale. The other is Grab, a Singapore-based company doing big business here by tapping into people's demand for comfortable rides. These companies have other ventures, but ride-sharing is the one they are most famous for.

Hence, if one has trouble getting around in the Jakarta traffic, downloading the Grab or Go-Jek app will solve your issues. There is one big obstacle though, and it comes in the form of the language barrier when hiring these rides. But with Google Translator available, nothing really comes in the way of a smooth ride.

Less coffee, more cricket: Patil

STAR SPORT DESK



The backlash continued against the India cricket team that surrendered in abject fashion to England in the second Test at Lord's on Sunday to go 0-2 down in the five-match series.

Yesterday, in his column for The Quint, former India cricketer and ex-chairman of selectors Sandeep Patil homed in on a pre-series quote from captain Virat Kohli to throw shade on the Indian cricket team in England.

Before the Indian team left for England, Kohli was asked about his plans and targets about the tour.

"I was asked this on the last tour of England as well. I said I want to walk around and have coffee. So my thinking is different when I go on tour as I try to literally enjoy the country," Kohli had said during the pre-departure press conference.

"Seeing the performance of the Indian team in the first two Tests so far, the team really seems to have taken their skipper's statement seriously -- they are truly only enjoying the coffee in English conditions. Nobody likes criticism but if a team performs this badly then they should also be ready to face the reality, facts and the criticism," Patil wrote.

"In earlier days, it was grilled in our minds that we needed to watch,

improve, practise hard, follow the senior players, learn from them and take their advice. But instead of taking the advice of players who have been on multiple tours of England, and have succeeded, Virat Kohli's team seems happy to be enjoying the country's coffee.

"In fact, if I look at the Indian captains who toured England, Ajit Wadekar, Sunil Gavaskar, Sachin Tendulkar, Sourav Ganguly and Azhar[uddin], none of them ever made such an irresponsible comment on the eve of such an important tour," added Patil, who played 29 Tests and 45 ODIs for India between 1980 and 1986.

He also took aim at the Indian team's approach of taking long breaks on tour -- in a two-week interval between the ODI and Test series, India played just one longer-version practice match and are in the midst of a five-day break after the Lord's debacle and the third Test starting on Saturday.

"I would like to remember my first tour of Australia, New Zealand and the Fiji Islands. It was a four-and-a-half-month-long tour but our captain Sunil Gavaskar never took a break and never allowed any member to take a break. The entire four-and-a-half months we were thinking about cricket, we were talking about cricket and we were playing cricket," wrote Patil.



I want to walk around and have coffee. So my thinking is different when I go on tour as I try to literally enjoy the country.

VIRAT KOHLI BEFORE THE ENGLAND TOUR

Debate rages over Stokes

AFP, London



England star Ben Stokes may have been cleared of affray but former cricket luminaries, while agreeing his behaviour was well below that expected of a man seen by many as a role model, are divided as to whether he should face further punishment.

The 27-year-old New Zealand-born all-rounder faces an internal disciplinary enquiry by the Cricket Discipline Commission (CDC) following his acquittal by unanimous decision of a jury on Tuesday.

Former Derbyshire batsman and qualified solicitor Tim O'Gorman is heading the investigation.

Stokes's team-mate Alex Hales -- who was with him during the late night brawl outside a club in Bristol, southwest England, last September but was not charged -- will also face the enquiry.

However, former England captains Mike Atherton and Nasser Hussain whilst both abhorring his behaviour are at odds with each other as to whether he should be punished further.

"With a not-guilty verdict, the way forward seems, to me, to be clear enough and should not involve further punishment," Atherton writes in The Times. Atherton conceded Stokes's heavy drinking that night and what ensued afterwards "is not exactly acceptable behaviour for an England player during international duty".

"There are clauses in an England cricketer's contract -- such as bringing

the game into disrepute -- that could yet result in punishment," the 50-year-old commented. "Although Stokes was never formally suspended from the England team, his non-selection for the Ashes came about clearly as a result of the events in Bristol. He missed the most high-profile series in which an England cricketer can play, essentially a six-month ban."

Hussain argued differently, saying the images caught on CCTV cannot just be ignored and the governing body the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) have to act.

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MICHAEL ATHERTON

"Some people would argue that Ben Stokes has had it tough, and has served his time in missing the Ashes, but I see it differently," he told The Daily Mail. "The ECB should not now take the easy option. It is far too serious an issue, and the footage far too serious, for people to think about moving on and

It is far too serious an issue for people to think about moving on and brushing things under the carpet.

NASSER HUSSAIN

brushing things under the carpet."

Former England spinner Vic Marks says in The Guardian there is no doubt Stokes "brought the game into disrepute" on a "feral night out" which does nothing to promote the image of the game the ECB wants to display to families.

Marks draws comparison between Stokes and a superstar all-rounder of another era and one he played with in the great Somerset side of the 1970's and 80's, Ian Botham.

"The very best cricketers often ooze invincibility; they are never out and never wrong," wrote Marks. "They feel invulnerable, capable of dominating any situation. I have witnessed this at close quarters when playing alongside Ian Botham."

"In Botham's era the backroom staff were not so sophisticated," observed Marks. "He once had an agent, Tim Hudson, whose response to an allegation about Ian smoking cannabis was famously, 'Doesn't everyone?'"