

History between women and final

ANISUR RAHMAN from Biratnagar



back-to-back final berths when they take on four-time champions India in the semifinal at the Sahid Rangsala in Biratnagar today.

The match will get underway at 3:15pm after the first semifinal between hosts Nepal and Sri Lanka at 11:00am at the same ground.

India have never been defeated in the 21 matches they have played in the SAFF Women's Championship since the inaugural edition in 2010, all the while averaging an incredible 6.23 goals per game. They were held to a draw only once, a goalless encounter against Bangladesh after 18 consecutive wins in the regional women's football extravaganza.

However, India are standing firmly in the way of Bangladesh's dream of playing consecutive finals and making history. The four-time champions are on song and have recorded massive wins against Maldives (6-0) and Sri Lanka (5-0) in the group stage, with seven different goalscorers.

Beating their neighbours is going to be as hard a task as climbing Mount Everest for Bangladesh, but it is not impossible as the young ladies showed when they almost caught out their superior opponents two years ago during that goalless draw.

A positive attitude was reflected by the girls when they were training at the Delhi Public School ground yesterday.

"India are obviously a strong



The Bangladesh team geared up for today's crucial semifinal encounter with India in the SAFF Women's Championship at the Delhi Public School ground yesterday. Defence is a concern, but Bangladesh could be buoyed by the return of forward Krishna Rani Sarkar.

team but there is no reason to be ing. "I scored against India goal as early as possible. nervous about playing them because we played South Korea, Japan and China as part of our preparations for the AFC Age-Group Championships. I told my teammates that there is nothing to be worried about because although India are ahead of us in terms of experience, we have an opportunity to reach the final by performing well," captain Sabina Khatun said after train-

before and will try my best to score again. But we also have other players capable of scoring and hopefully they will try to avail the opportunities."

Bangladesh are likely to make two changes by including fitagain Krishna Rani Sarker and Sanjida Khatun in place of Misrat Jahan Moushumi and Nilufar Yesmin. They are also likely to play attacking football to get a

"We are not thinking about the past or India's strength. We will go for a win and the girls will give their all," said head coach Golam Rabbani Choton. "As a coach, I don't believe tomorrow [Wednesday will be the last day for Bangladesh because there are many instances in football of weaker teams overcoming big hurdles."

Indian coach Maymol Rocky

opponents but was confident of :

advancing. good sides in the tournament and : be a good match," said Krishna. said. "We can't say that we will win : When the sides lock horns tomorrow, Bangladesh could breakers."

Inspiration from little things

SPORTS REPORTER from Biratnagar



Ngangom Bala Devi and Yumnam Kamala Devi are two strikers on India's women's national football team who command respect when spoken of by their Bangladeshi counterparts.

The reason why the names of these two prolific strikers is still fresh in Bangladesh's memory is because in their previous nine meetings with

India, the women in red and green were thoroughly outclassed by the great pace and goalscoring abilities of both · Bala and Kamala. The duo accounted for 18 of the 39 goals in total scored (Bala stuck 12 and Kamala scored 6) against Bangladesh, who mustered four in return. In their last meeting during the Tokyo Olympic

· Qualifiers last November, 29-year-old Bala and 27-year-old . Kamala struck four and two goals respectively, handing the · women in red and green a massive 7-1 defeat. In light of that gargantuan loss, the pair's presence was almost palpable during a pre-tournament press conference on the eve of Bangladesh's departure for the 5th SAFF Women's Championship even though both Bala and Kamala were excluded from India's squad for this edition. There might have been some controversy over the

Bangladeshi players' ages but it is evident that even a few of the players, who are key features in the senior team, such as Maria Manda, Monica Chakma and Rupna Chakma, were born around 2003, one or two years before Bala and Kamala started representing India at age-level tournaments.

This time around, four-time champions India brought a comparatively young squad with an average age of below 22 in the absence of Bala and Kamala, who scored 36 and 41 goals in 43 and 61 international matches respectively.

Bangladesh coach Golam Rabbani Choton, forward PHOTO: BFF: Krishna Rani Sarker and goalkeeper Rupna Chakma all expressed their relief over the pair's exclusion, however, believes Bangladesh will be tough. Krishna still believes that India will be a tough nut to crack. "Despite the absence of Bala and Kamala, they have

experienced players who are also good. We will try to stop "Bangladesh are one of the · those players. If we fight them equally, I think it is going to

meeting them will be difficult. We: "Bala and Kamala troubled us most during the Olympic will play up to the mark and thus · Qualifiers, scoring six goals in total, so it is a relief that they go through to the final," Rocky : are not with India's squad," said Choton.

the match directly because seek inspiration from their spirited performances in the last Bangladesh can come hard at us, · three meetings with India, especially from the 0-0 draw in but we are also prepared for tie- : the last edition, where they lost the final 3-1 against the * same opposition.

'It's a lot of cricket, but just play'

AFP, New Delhi

Sourav Ganguly offered advice Tuesday for cricketers worried the short turnaround between the Indian Premier League and the World Cup could leave them fatigued -- just enjoy it while you can. The gruelling Twenty20 tourna-

ment starts Saturday and runs flatout for nearly six weeks, leaving barely any breathing room before the World Cup gets underway on May 30.

Coaches and captains are preparing for star players to be recalled from the IPL by their national cricket boards for a rest in the days before the game's biggest spectacle gets underway in England and Wales.

But Ganguly, one of India's most successful former skippers and special adviser to the Delhi Capitals IPL team, said those fretting about timetables and fatigue should "just play".

"Yes, it is a lot of cricket, but just play. You don't play forever," he told reporters in Delhi.

"I have always said there is a limited time to play the sport and when you are getting the opportunity at the international level and the IPL level, these will not come back.

"So just find a way to get rest, get fresh... make the most of it."

A first loss for MSC and a BKSP run-fest

SPORTS REPORTER



Prime Bank skipper Anamul Haque continued his good run of form, scoring yet another century -- his second ton in succession in this edition of the Dhaka Premier

League (DPL) -- to help his side post a mammoth 344 for six against Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club and win by 29 runs in a rain-interrupted game at the BKSP-3 ground yesterday. However, Abhimanyu Easwaran -- one of three Indians who shone on the day -- also scored a magnificent century to help Prime Bank's cause. At the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium

in Mirpur, despite a 126-ball 107 from opener Abdul Mazid, Mohammedan Sporting Club experienced their first defeat of this edition of the DPL as they could not defend a challenging 295 for seven, losing the game by four wickets against Legends of Rupganj.

However, it was a rather low-scoring contest at the Khan Shaheb Osman Ali Stadium in Fatullah as Abahani Limited chased down a modest 203 for nine posted by Shinepukur Cricket Club -- courtesy of India Test cricketer Wasim Jaffer's 76 runs off 106 balls -- and won the game by five wickets with nine balls to spare.

The BKSP-3 ground had previously produced a few high-scoring contests in this tournament and the run fest seemed to continue. After being asked to bat first, Prime Bank recovered from their initial blow -losing opener Rubel Mia for a duck in the third over -- with an inspired 194-run second-wicket stand between skipper Anamul and Easwaran. In the first ball of the 38th



over of the game, Sheikh Jamal spinner Tanbir Hayder dispatched Anamul for a 120ball 101 before scalping the wicket of Zakir Hasan for a first-ball duck in the last ball of the same over. However, Easwaran's 126-ball 133 and an unbeaten, late 32-ball 67-run cameo from all-rounder Ariful Haque ensured Prime Bank finished on a high.

However, in chase of a rain-reduced

236-run target from 37.1 overs, Sheikh Jamal all-rounder Nasir Hossain's run-aball 76 and skipper Nurul Hasan's unbeaten 54 went in vain as they could manage only 206 for four.

In Fatullah, Abahani opener Wasim scored a half-ton to ensure a comfortable victory for his side after pacer Rubel Hossain's economical figures of two for 28

in eight overs and Mosaddek Hossain's three for 41 helped bundle Shinepukur for a below-par total.

In the other game, Mohammedan opener Mazid's valiant century was later trumped by Rupganj skipper Naeem Islam's 85 and 51 runs from Rishi Dhawan -- who had played three ODIs for India -as Rupganj chased the challenging total.

SCORES IN BRIEF

PRIME BANK V SHEIKH

JAMAL PRIME BANK: 344 for 6 in 50 overs (Anamul 101, Easwaran 133, Ariful 67 not out; Tanbir 2-27) SHEIKH JAMAL: 206 for four in 37.1 overs (Nasir 76, Nurul 54 not out; Nahidul 2-51) Result: Prime Bank won by 29 runs (D/L method)

SHINEPUKUR V **ABAHANI**

SHINEPUKUR: 203 for 9 in 50 overs (Afif 48, Towhid 39; Mosaddek 3-41, Rubel 2-28) ABAHANI: 206 for five in 48.3 overs (Wasim 76, Najmul 42; Shoriful 3-44) Result: Abahani won by 5 wickets. MOHAMMEDAN V

RUPGANJ MOHAMMEDAN: 295 for 7 in 50 overs (Mazid 107, Nadif 64; Shahid 3-70)

RUPGANJ: 296 for six in 49.2 overs (Mominul 55, Naeem 85, Dhawan 51; Shafiul 2-65) Result: Rupganj won by 4

wickets.

Afnan Islam, younger brother of national cricketer Shadman Islam, led Willes Little Flower School and College to an eightwicket win against Ahmedbagh Ideal High School with an all-round performance in the Prime **Bank National School** Cricket Championship at Zahurul Haque Hall of Dhaka University yesterday. Willes chased down Ideal's paltry 57 courtesy of a fine 36 from Afnan, who had earlier scalped two wickets.

PHOTO:

PRIME BANK



Dimuth wants to lead in WC

ICC

Dimuth Karunaratne, who last played ODI cricket at the ICC World Cup 2015, is now in contention to lead Sri Lanka at this year's edition.

Karunaratne is understood to have been asked to remain in Sri Lanka through April to play the provincial one-day tournament, which will ascertain his credentials to play in the one-day side.

"The selectors haven't confirmed anything, but they've told me to keep in mind there's a possibility I could become one-day captain," Karunaratne said.

Kiron gets bail

SPORTS REPORTER

A Dhaka court yesterday granted bail to Bangladesh Football Federation's women's wing chairperson and FIFA Council member Mahfuza Akter Kiron in a defamation case lodged against her recently.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Sadbir Yasir Ahsan Chowdhury granted her bail till April 2 upon a bond of Tk 10,000 yesterday afternoon, confirmed Kiron's lawyer advocate Liakat Hossain.

"This is a bailable case. Furthermore, the court considered her social status and her illness in granting the bail," Liakat told The Daily Star, adding that his client might be released

from jail by today [Wednesday]. The BFF and FIFA official was arrested and sent to jail on March 16 in a case lodged on March 12 by a sports organiser named Abu Hassan Prince, under Bangladesh Penal Code 500, for allegedly making derogatory remarks against Prime

Minister Sheikh Hasina. Amnesty International issued a press release on Monday demanding her immediate release. FIFA and AFC contacted BFF, expressing concern over her arrest.