Star SPORT
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DHAKA WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 4, 2019, *AGRAHAYAN 19, 1426 BS*

PHOTO: BOA

Bangladeshi karatekas brought triple delight for the country as they bagged three gold medals in the 13th SA Games yesterday. Humaira Akhter Antara (3rd from L) won in the under-62kg kumite category, Al Amin Islam (3rd from R) grabbed top spot in the under-60kg kumite category and Marzan Aktar Priya (2nd from R) emerged victorious in the under-55kg kumite category at the Satdobato Sports Complex in Kathmandu yesterday.

Women cricketers off to flying start

SPORTS REPORTER *from Kathmandu*

Bangladesh women's cricket team's campaign to win the gold got off to a great start as they romped to a seven-wicket win over fellow title-contenders Sri Lanka in the T20 competition in Pokhara yesterday. Opting to bowl first, Bangladesh restricted Sri Lanka to 122 for six, thanks to a four-wicket haul from spinner Nahida Akter.

Sanjida Islam's unbeaten 51 and an unbeaten 18-ball 23 from Fargana Haque then propelled the women in red and green to the target with nine balls to spare.

Salma Khatun and Co will face Nepal today and Maldives tomorrow. The final, where the top two teams from the four-team round-robin stage will compete, will take place on December 8.

The men's cricket team, meanwhile, will take on Maldives in their opening match in Kathmandu today.

Bangladesh are the defending champions in this event, with Sri Lanka, Nepal, Maldives and Bhutan the other teams who will play each other in a round-robin format.

Shooting brings two silver medals

Bangladesh won two silver medals in team events of shooting on the third day of the Games at the Satdobato Sports Complex in Kathmandu yesterday.

Bangladesh women's 10m air rifle team, comprising Atkia Hasan Disha, Zakia Sultana Tumpa and Sharmin Akter Ratna secured silver.

However, they failed to win an individual medal in the same category as Disha finished fifth while Tumpa finished seventh. Ratna, Bangladesh's most experienced shooter, failed to make it to the final round.

Bangladesh men's team, comprising Abdullahel Baki, Mohammad Yousuf Ali and Shovon Chowdhury won silver in men's 59m three-position event. Neither of them, however, managed to get a medal in the individual event.

Wushu yields a silver too

Bangladesh bagged a silver and a bronze medal in wushu. Omar Faruk won silver in men's Chan Quan Thaulo category while Nur Nahar won bronze in the same category for women.

Men in kho kho final, women beaten in semis

While the Bangladesh men's kho kho team made it to the final, where they will face India, the women's team lost by a single point against Nepal in the semifinals. Bangladesh had secured the silver medal in both events of kho kho last time around.

Saaid fastest man, Archana fastest woman

Mahfuzur the face-saver for Bangladesh in athletics

SPORTS REPORTER *from Kathmandu*

Maldives' Saaid Hassan unseated Sri Lanka's Himasha Eashan to become the fastest man of South Asia while India's Archana Suseent became the fastest woman, winning their respective 100m sprint events at the Dasarath Rangasala in Kathmandu yesterday morning.

It was sweet revenge for Maldives' celebrity sprinter Saaid, who was beaten to the gold by Eashan in the last edition of the regional Games three years ago.

Saaid finished his 100m dash in 10.49 seconds, beating Eashan by 0.01 seconds. However, Saaid's effort was 0.21 seconds slower than the Games record, which was set by Eashan in 2016. Sami Ullah of Pakistan bagged the bronze, clocking 10.66 seconds.

Bangladesh's Ismail Hossain finished fifth, clocking 10.75 seconds while the country's fastest man, Hassan Mia, finished eighth among eight finalists with a timing of 10.92 seconds.

In the women's 100m sprint, India's Archana Suseendran took the gold at 11.80 seconds, beating Sri Lanka's Thanuzi Amasha (11.82s) and Lakshika Sugand (11.84s), who took silver and bronze respectively.

Bangladesh's participants were poor in this event too as national champion Shirin Akter finished sixth while Sharifa Khatun finished seventh, both much slower than their personal bests.

While failure in sprint was quite expected as Bangladesh, once a breeding ground of the region's fastest sprinters, have been falling behind their South Asian counterparts in the past decade, there was a really good performance from high-jumper Mahfuzur Rahman who lived up to expectations with a silver medal in men's high-jump.

Mahfuzur Rahman of Bangladesh talks to reporters after winning silver medal in high-jump event. PHOTO: STAR

The man from Bangladesh Navy cleared 2.16 metres, eclipsing the national record set by himself earlier this year by 0.1 metres. Mahfuz won the silver jointly with India's Chethan Balasub while India's Anil Sarvesh won the gold by clearing 2.21 metres.

"I had the confidence of doing well. I'm very happy to have won the silver with a national record. I had an idea about the Indian jumpers. So, I knew if I could perform my best, I could win a medal," the 19-year-old said after his effort.

It was Bangladesh's first ever medal in the high-jump event in the history of the Games. Mahfuzur's feat has already bettered Bangladesh's efforts in athletics from the 2016 edition where the country had won only two bronze medals, both in the team 4x100m relay.

PHOTO: STAR

Maldives' Saaid Hassan spreads his nation's flag after winning the 100m sprint of the 13th South Asian Games at the Dasarath Rangasala in Kathmandu yesterday.

BCB mull neutral venue for Pak tour

SPORTS REPORTER

Amid continued uncertainty over whether the national team would get the security clearance to tour Pakistan in January-February 2020, the Bangladesh Cricket Board [BCB] are mulling whether to propose shifting the tour to a neutral venue if they do not get the green signal from the Bangladesh government.

According to the Future Tours Programme, Bangladesh are scheduled to play three T20Is and two Tests in Pakistan.

"If we get the clearance from the government, we can start discussions with the Pakistan board but we are yet to get the clearance. Everything will depend on what the government wants. We will definitely sit with the player to take their opinion as well if the government gives clearance for the tour," BCB cricket operations chairman Akram Khan told reporters at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium yesterday.

A delegation from the Bangladesh government recently visited Pakistan for a security assessment and on the basis of that, the BCB had sent the national women's team and the Bangladesh under-16 team to tour Pakistan earlier this year. The same delegation is to advise the Bangladesh government and the BCB on going ahead with the national team's tour of Pakistan.

AKRAM KHAN

Akram said that there was a discussion about playing the Test and T20I series in separate segments, but the Pakistan Cricket Board [PCB] has already declined that proposal. According to media reports, the PCB believes that having a series split to two locations would have a negative impact on the host country in terms of hosting future international series and the Pakistan Super League T20.

"But if we don't get the clearance from the government for any reason, we have to discuss playing at a neutral venue. If we get the clearance, then it will be different. So, at this moment, we have to wait on the security report from the government," the former Bangladesh captain added.

The Bangladesh men's team has not been given the green signal to travel to Pakistan since a terrorist attack in Lahore on the touring Sri Lankan national team's bus in 2009. However, West Indies and Sri Lanka have visited for short tours, which included only ODI and T20I matches.

All eyes will be on the BCB now as Sri Lanka are set to tour Pakistan with a full-strength side for a Test series this month.

Akram however informed the government approval will have nothing to do with other teams touring Pakistan.

"Who is going there is not the issue for us. If we get the clearance from the government, we'll think about the tour. As I said earlier, at this moment we are waiting for the government's suggestion," he concluded.

Since the Bangladesh players were in the vicinity of a terrorist attack on a mosque in Christchurch in March this year, the BCB have started sending a security team before touring any country.

Draw leaves booters on the edge

ATIQUE ANAM *from Kathmandu*

Bangladesh coach Jamie Day defended his players, saying his team deserved to win based on performance, after a 1-1 draw against Maldives jeopardized their bid to reach the final of the football event of the South Asian Games.

An own goal from Maldives skipper Akram Abdul Ghani gave Bangladesh a first-half lead after the red and greens had another disallowed, but Maldives fought back brilliantly and ended the stronger following Mahudhee Hossain's 70th-minute equaliser.

The draw comes after a defeat against Bhutan in their first match left Bangladesh bottom of the five-team table. They now have one point, level with Sri Lanka who have played one game. Nepal lead the table with three points from one game followed by Bhutan on three and Maldives on two.

However, Day believes his team still have a chance to go through to the final.

"I'm pleased with the performance of the players today and I think we are still in with a chance for a top-two finish," Day said at the post-match press conference, adding that he would be happy with a medal of any colour.

With Tutul Hossain in for Yeasin Khan and Shushanto Tripura replacing Bishwanath Ghosh, Bangladesh made a positive start.

They should have been in front in the 20th minute when Saad Uddin poked home after a header had bounced off the post on a cross from Jamal Bhuiyan, but the referee incredibly signalled for a corner-kick, deeming that the ball had bounced out after hitting the post and rolled back in.

But Bangladesh took a deserved lead, albeit fortuitously, 10 minutes later when Riyadul Hasan's back-header on a throw-in from Rabiul Hasan was blocked by the goalkeeper, only to roll back into the net off the back of Abdul Ghani.

Bangladesh had chances to extend the lead, but Maldives were growing stronger all the time and appeared a different side after the break.

The equaliser came on 70 minutes, courtesy of a powerful shot at the near post from Mahudhee following a mazy run and tee-up from Naiz Hassan. Mahudhee and Naiz wreaked havoc and the latter saw two attempts come off the woodwork.

However, Day felt Bangladesh created as many chances as the opposition and should have had a victory in their bag.

"We had a goal disallowed. The ball came off the post and it was called a corner. If we had that goal, there was no coming back for Maldives," the coach opined, further claiming that the results were a reflection of fatigue from playing continuous football.

Bangladesh will play Sri Lanka tomorrow before squaring off against hosts Nepal on December 8.

Bangladesh captain Nazmul Hossain Shanto (L) and batsman Saif Hassan (R) are pictured speaking with selector Habibul Bashar ahead of their SA Games T20 cricket event match against Maldives today. Following the national team's dismal run in the just concluded tour of India, perhaps the under-23 team could bring the fans something to cheer about. PHOTO: BOA

Smaller crowd for opening ceremony

SPORTS REPORTER

Preparations are in full swing for the opening ceremony of the upcoming Bangabandhu Bangladesh Premier League (BBPL) T20, slated for December 8 at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur. Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) President Nazmul Hassan said yesterday that only a fraction of the stadium's capacity could be accommodated for the extravaganza.

Hassan informed they were preparing to accommodate a total of around 8,000. At full capacity, the stadium can accommodate 25,000 spectators.

The positioning of the stage was an issue, which will render it impossible to make seating arrangements at the sides and the back. "Since there is a problem with viewing angles, we can only accommodate a small number of spectators. The problem is that we can't arrange seating for the sides or the back [of the stage]. How many we can accommodate is a big question. We had to reduce the capacity from what we initially decided," Hassan told reporters in Mirpur yesterday. "According to our estimation, not more than 8,00 can be accommodated."

While the arrangement is for 8,000 people overall, there are separate quotas for clubs, BCB councillors and various organisations. Thus, only around 5,000 tickets will be made available to the general public.

"Naturally, there is a lot of demand for tickets, so there will be less quantity. There are some organisations who are intrinsically involved with us and we have to provide for them. Overall, we think that we will be able to provide about 5,000 tickets for the general public," Hassan said while adding that about 1,000 seats will be arranged inside the ground for VIPs.

The president also informed that information regarding ticket prices would be made available soon.