

Potential to score fast and plenty to prove

With the Bangabandhu T20 Cup starting from November 24, cricket enthusiasts in Bangladesh are eager to watch local stars battle it out against each. In the lead-up to the tournament, The Daily Star tries to assess and analyse each of the five teams. Today, we present the third part, an overview of Gazi Group Chattogram.

SPORTS REPORTER



BACKGROUND:

Gazi Group Chattogram roped in Mustafizur Rahman, a Grade A player, from the players' draft with their initial call. While Mustafizur seems to have lost the magic touch that he had at the start of his career, the left-hander can still be crucial for any side he represents. His partnership with yet another left-arm quick -- young Shoriful Islam -- in the opening overs, coupled with the top and middle-over batting prowess makes the franchise a contender title.

NATIONAL STARS:

Aside from Mustafizur, Chattogram also boast others national stars including Soumya Sarkar, who was scrutinised in the three-team BCB President's Cup last month for his slow scoring rate. The left-hander would surely like to shrug off all that criticism and start afresh in this tournament, which could well be good news for the franchise. Mohammad Salahuddin, Chattogram's coach, said his biggest challenge would be to get the best out of the left-hander. "There is no doubt about Soumya's potential. I think, as a coach of Chattogram, my biggest challenge will be to bring the best out of him," said Salahuddin.

In the batting department, Soumya will have the likes of Liton Das, Mohammad Mithun, Mominul Haque and Mosaddek Hossain alongside him. In the bowling department, Mustafizur

will have national teammate Taijul Islam bringing in spin variation.

LOCAL PERFORMERS:

National stars failing to fire will not be much of a problem for Chattogram, with national discard Ziaur Rahman, young players like Shoriful, Mehadi Hasan, Mahmudul Hasan Joy and Rakibul Hasan and domestic performer like Shamsur Rahman ready to pick up the slack.

WHAT SETS CHATTOGRAM APART:

According to the experienced

Salahuddin, it is their potential to score quick runs in the middle that sets Chattogram apart from the other four teams. Salahuddin has reasons for what he claimed.

"The strengths of the teams are similar when there are no foreign players involved. The strategies remain simple too. Foreign players are often the ones who score quick runs in the middle. While other teams might suffer in this department, I think players like Mosaddek, Ziaur and young Nahidul Islam give us the edge over others in this regard," explained Salahuddin.

KEY PLAYER:

For Chattogram, the way Liton Das plays at the top will be crucial. Liton, one of the most exquisite players in the Bangladesh national squad, has the ability to set the tone for a big score as an opener. The right-hander had good starts in last month's BCB President's Cup but could not make a mark that reflects his actual ability. The team will surely look up to him and want the exquisite right-hander to give Chattogram a flying start with his treat-to-the-eye shot-making in the tournament.



PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Semifinals line-up complete as Italy and Belgium prevail

AGENCIES



Italy gave another impressive performance and extended their unbeaten run to 22 games with a 2-0 win away to Bosnia as they reached the Nations League final four on Wednesday while Belgium cruised past Denmark 4-2 in Leuven to book a place, with Romelu Lukaku scoring twice.

Belgium and Italy join world champions France and Spain in qualifying for next October's finals.

Italy were again missing coach Roberto Mancini after he tested positive for Covid-19 as well as a number of key players including injured defenders Giorgio Chiellini and Leonardo Bonucci, and forward Ciro Immobile over a Covid-19 related issue.

Bosnia, already relegated, were without Ibrahim Sehic, Sead Kolasinac and Edin Dzeko after they tested positive for Covid-19.

"The coach wants us to play our football wherever we go and that is the mentality we've really taken in," said Italy winger Lorenzo Insigne. "This shirt has to be honoured every time and we give our all for Italy."

"It will be nice to measure ourselves up because we're talking about the strongest teams in Europe so we can't wait to compare ourselves to them to see our

level, how far we've come," assistant coach Alberto Esvani, who filled in for head coach Roberto Mancini, said.

Roberto Martinez's world-number-one-ranked Belgians only had to avoid defeat to qualify from Group A2 but secured a finals spot in style.

Lukaku, who has now scored 17 goals in his last 14 international games after his second-half double, said Belgium can play with flair and attacking style but also know how to grind out a result.



The Belgians have been one of Europe's form teams in recent years but despite topping the FIFA rankings, they have sometimes looked vulnerable under pressure when not dominating matches.

"We have proven now we can play difficult games. We can play teams off the park but we also know how to win when its needed even if it is not with our best style. When we need we can play with a strong defence and on the counter attack," he said.



Italian players and officials celebrated jubilantly after qualifying for the final four of the UEFA Nations League following a 2-0 win over Bosnia on Wednesday, extending their unbeaten streak under Roberto Mancini to 22 games. It is the best run for the Azzurri since July 2006, when they went 25 games unbeaten and won the World Cup.

PHOTO: TWITTER

GUARDIOLA EXTENDS MAN CITY CONTRACT TO 2023

Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola has signed a new two-year contract that will keep him at the club until the end of the 2022-23 season, the Premier League club said on Thursday. Spanish Guardiola has guided City to two Premier League titles and an FA Cup since his arrival in 2016. "Pep's contract extension is the natural next step in a journey which has evolved over many years. It is a product of the mutual trust and respect that exists between him and the entire Club," City chairman Khaldoon Mubarak said in a statement. His current five-year stay at City is the longest spell in charge of a single club since he began his managerial career in 2008. The 49-year-old managed Barcelona from 2008-12 and spent three years in charge of Germany's Bayern Munich before joining City. "Ever since I arrived at Manchester City I have been made to feel so welcome in the club and in the city itself," Guardiola said. "Since then we have achieved a great deal together, scored goals, won games and trophies, and we are all very proud of that success."



....REUTERS



Bangladesh national football team reached Qatar yesterday to play their away World Cup and Asian Cup Qualifying match against the hosts on December 4.

PHOTO: BFF

'Excited to play but worried about the result'

SPORTS REPORTER

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home 2-0.

Most expect that Bangladesh will opt for a defensive strategy in order to thwart Qatar's formidable attack and that there will be little room for attacking players to shine. In that case, Jibon's exclusion would have little impact on Bangladesh's performance and Mahbubur Rahman Sufil, who is expected to step in, could do the same job.

However, left-back Rahmat Mia has a different view about the tie.

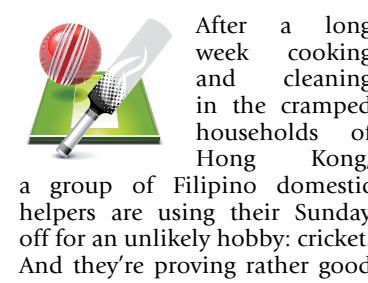
"Actually, the backline should be bold against Qatar and the forwards should also avail the opportunities they get during the match. It is a big problem if the strikers can't hit the target regardless of how many times the defenders stop the Qatari forwards. The absence of strikers like Jibon and Matin Mia will be felt; we will certainly miss them," Rahmat told The Daily Star yesterday before leaving the country.

"We all are not fully fit yet but the team is in high spirits and everyone is positive. I believe we can overcome the deficiency in our fitness levels over the next two weeks. The backline kept two clean sheets in the past two matches and we will try to carry that momentum into the Qatar match.

"We are excited to play in Qatar after a long break due to the sudden suspension of the World Cup Qualifiers but we are also worried about the result because we are going to play such a match after a long gap."

Cricket to forget all stress and troubles

AFP, HONG KONG



After a long week cooking and cleaning in the cramped households of Hong Kong, a group of Filipino domestic helpers are using their Sunday off for an unlikely hobby: cricket. And they're proving rather good at it.

Despite no background in the game, scant coaching and very little time, the SCC Divas have made a startling impact, winning Hong Kong's development league twice in their first two seasons and going unbeaten since stepping up to the main divisions this year.

Along the way, they've inspired the Philippines' first national women's cricket team, providing seven of its players, while shaking up Hong Kong's sleepy cricket scene, a remnant of British colonialism.

"We are all domestic helpers. Some are new players, having their first time holding a cricket ball," said Josie Arimas, 52, captain and founder of the SCC Divas.

The satisfying clunk of bat on ball, at the scenic Po Kong Village Cricket Ground overlooked by green hills and tower blocks, is a world away from daily life for the Divas. Many of them work from 6am till midnight, six days a week, scrubbing, shopping and looking after kids, to support their own children and families left behind in the Philippines.

They get "no rest. They're tough", said Arimas.

Tales of abuse and exploitation abound among Hong Kong's 400,000 foreign domestic workers, most of them from the Philippines or Indonesia. One domestic worker watching the Divas said that rather than the government-mandated rest day every week, her employer gives

her just six hours off a month, and makes her sleep in the living room.

Divas player Liza Avelino said: "It's very relaxing, it makes my day worthwhile. It's good to be active and you forget all stress and the troubles and everything."

During this month's 45-run win over the Cavaliers, a team from the venerable and well-heeled Hong Kong Cricket Club, the Divas' skills honed in baseball, a popular sport in the Philippines, were in evidence. Positive hitting helped set a

member of Cricket Hong Kong. "They get one day off a week, and what do they do? They come and sit and watch, cheer along, train whenever they can. It's pretty impressive."

Alvina Tam, Cricket Hong Kong's director of development and a Cavaliers player, said the Divas had added a new element to the sport in the city, which is dominated by the expat and South Asian community.

"What they brought into women's cricket in Hong Kong was their sense of unity, the



challenging total of 167-6, before the Divas restricted the Cavaliers to 122-4 with some energetic fielding including two side-on, direct hits on the stumps.

The team was cheered on throughout by a vocal band of team-mates and supporters, who picnicked by the boundary rope and operated the scoreboard.

"They're so passionate about it. They all come here and they all watch and they make a day of it," said Cavaliers captain Tracy Walker, an independent board

sense of teamwork and working together," said Tam.

For the Divas players, separated from their families and living far from home, the team also serves as a support network, according to Avelino. "It's not just about sport, it's also about having a family to meet up with. It's a very close kinship, a sisterhood," she said.

"Being away from home, to have a group of people doing the same thing is very empowering. We love it and we look forward to doing it on Sunday."



Spotlight on Flick after Spain debacle

REUTERS, BERLIN

Bayern Munich coach Hansi Flick has been the talk of the town this week, even though the German champions have not played a game in 10 days.

Spain's 6-0 demolition of Germany in the Nations League on Tuesday has turned Flick into a potential successor to Germany coach Joachim Loew if he quits.

While it is unlikely that Loew, in charge for 14 years, will leave right away, it is hardly surprising that his assistant from 2006-2014 should be linked with the job.

The Bayern coach has enjoyed a sensational first year in charge, winning five titles in 2020, including the Champions League and a domestic double, after taking over last November from Niko Kovac.

In his first Bundesliga appointment as head coach he has had more success than experienced predecessors like Pep Guardiola and Carlo Ancelotti, neither of whom managed to bring the Champions League trophy to Munich.

When the Bavarians take on Werder Bremen on Saturday it will be Flick's 50th game in charge in all competitions. The 55-year-old already boasts an eye-popping managerial record at the club of 45 wins, one draw and three losses.