



## Can Ali Ashfaq be contained?

SPORTS REPORTER FROM MALE

SAFF Maldives

Illustrious forward Ali Ashfaq may now be 36, but he can still prove lethal for any opponent and Bangladesh will be well aware of his deadly moves in today's crucial SAFF Championship encounter against hosts Maldives.

Bangladesh have many times been punished by genuine forwards and eliminated in tournaments where they had been performing well and Ali Ashfaq is ready to reprise his role in that story. He has twice inspired Maldives as Bangladesh were ousted from the group stages of the SAFF Championship in 2011 and 2015.

In 2011, Bangladesh required an outright win over Maldives in the last game of the group stages to progress but Ashfaq proved too much of a hurdle, nutmegging a defender and setting up his teammate for the opener before completing the rout with a goal in the 3-1 win. He also roused Maldives to another 3-1 win in the 2015 SAFF Championship.

With their sights on the final, Bangladesh must stop Ali Ashfaq in today's match but also take note of Ali Fisir and the two other wingers.

"Yes, we have planned for them [Ali

Ashfaq and Ali Fisir] but don't want to disclose them. Apart from Ashfaq and Fisir, you probably forgot to mention wingers Mahudhee Hossain and Hamza Mohammedan. Those two wingers have completely different characteristics compared to India's [wingers], who were comfortable playing in the wide areas by crossing. But Hossain and Hamza tend to go inside and they are excellent playmakers. They can also hold the midfield and defend well," Bangladesh coach Oscar Bruzon said.

"Their forward players are really different but we need to play accordingly. We need to be very smart and concentrate if we want to keep a clean sheet but I am sure they are going to play against the best defence in the tournament," said Bruzon, who had coached Ali Ashfaq when he was working with Maldivian outfit New Radiant SC.

Maldives coach Ali Suzain has placed his faith in Ashfaq, who has hit 53 goals in 82 matches for Maldives.

"He was the striker in our last match. As we said, he is the best striker and we are very happy with his performance. He had a good performance during yesterday's [Tuesday] training. We think our attacking will be very quick and fast and we hope we can get a good result with Ashfaq on our side," Suzain said.



## 'Going to be even more challenging for Maldives'

ANISUR RAHMAN FROM MALE

SAFF Maldives

Bolstered by a creditable 1-1 draw against India in the previous match, Bangladesh are looking forward to preserving the momentum of their performance in their crucial upcoming SAFF Championship encounter as they square off against the hosts and defending champions Maldives at the National Football Stadium in Male, Maldives today. The game will get underway at 10:00pm (Bangladesh Standard Time) after seven-time champions India take on Sri Lanka in the day's first match at 5:00pm.

Bangladesh are in the second position of the five-team table after leader Nepal, and they are expecting to stay unbeaten against Maldives to strengthen their claim to feature in the final of the regional football extravaganza after 18 years.

A defeat against Bangladesh will definitely reduce Maldives' chances to defend the title they won in

Dhaka, so the hosts are desperate to derail Bangladesh, who are surprisingly performing better under new Spanish coach Oscar Bruzon.

Bruzon, who had been in Maldives for two years with New Radiant

afford dropping more points," said Bruzon at the pre-match conference yesterday.

"Tomorrow, it's going to be an open game and both teams will be trying to win. We don't want to think much about the host country or the

because of a 1-1 draw against India. So it's a very tough challenge for us and we have to go for three points in front of our own crowd," said Suzain.

Maldives are yet to lose against Bangladesh since their defeat in the SAFF Championship final in 2003. During the last 18 years, Maldives had beaten Bangladesh thrice - 3-1 and 3-1 in 2011 and 2015 SAFF Championship before humiliating the men in red and green 5-0 in a friendly match in 2016.

However, an in-form Bangladesh will definitely be hoping for an outright victory this time around, which will almost ensure their place in the final while ousting the hosts from the tournament in the process. In that case, the forwards need to step up to score the goals but Bruzon wants to bank on all players, labelling them as 11 strikers and 11 defenders in the spirit of total football. Bangladesh will miss the services of Rakib Hossain and Bishwanath Ghosh, who are suspended for the match.

| BANGLADESH V MALDIVES IN SAFF CHAMPIONSHIP             |       |       |                               |
|--|-------|-------|-------------------------------|
| Bangladesh   | 1     | 1     | Maldives, 1997 (Group stage)  |
| Bangladesh   | 1     | 0     | Maldives, 2003 (Group Stage)  |
| Bangladesh   | 1 (5) | 1 (3) | Maldives, 2003 (Final)        |
| Bangladesh   | 1     | 3     | Maldives, 2011, (Group stage) |
| Bangladesh   | 1     | 3     | Maldives, 2015 (Group-stage)  |
| [OVERALL: BANGLADESH PLAYED 12 MATCHES, W-4, D-4, L-4] |       |       |                               |

Club, believes that Maldives will be under more pressure than Bangladesh.

"We are approaching one game at a time. I think it's going to be even more challenging for Maldives because this match is the final for them. They are hosts and can't

FIFA ranking," said the 44-year-old coach.

Maldives coach Ali Suzain is wary of the magnitude of the challenge from their perspective as well.

"At the moment, the form of Bangladesh is very good and the motivation will be very high



## Brazil have one eye on WC qualification

AFP, Montevideo

After last month's turbulent round of World Cup qualification matches, for their next games Brazil can boast a full squad and a clear objective: booking their ticket for Qatar.

The Selecao have a perfect record of eight wins from their eight qualifiers so far ahead of Thursday's trip to Venezuela, followed by a clash away to Colombia on Sunday and the visit of Uruguay next week.

Three more victories could possibly secure Brazil's qualification in record time. Brazil will also hope to avoid the chaos of last month's qualifiers when coach Tite was shorn of nine members of his original squad and saw their clash with Argentina abandoned after just 10 minutes by Brazilian public health officials.

Those issues have now been confined to the past, although there is still no news on when the match will be replayed.

Brazil lead the single South American qualifying table by six points from Argentina

and their in-form Lionel Messi, who last week opened his account for Paris Saint-Germain with a wonder goal to seal a 2-0 Champions League win over Manchester City. Unbeaten Argentina travel to Paraguay on Thursday, host Uruguay on Sunday and then entertain Peru next week.

Last time out, Messi scored a hat-trick in a 3-0 win at Bolivia to overtake

Pele as the top international goalscorer in South American football, taking his tally to 79 goals in the light blue and white stripes.

Like Brazil, Copa America champions Argentina's qualification looks to be a formality but the battle behind them for the remaining two places is fierce.



WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS (FRIDAY)

Paraguay vs Argentina (5:00 am, BST)

Venezuela vs Brazil (5:30 am, BST)

## BCB elections go as predicted

SPORTS REPORTER



The atmosphere past the main gate of the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur was electric all day long yesterday, with the vibe of the Bangladesh Cricket Board elections, featuring chants and slogans similar to what we see in political rallies and national elections, engulfing the home of cricket.

There was no tough contest when it came to the ballot box, with the majority of candidates who were expected to win managing to make it in the end.

Even before the unofficial results were announced, several candidates were seen being congratulated through the giving of flowers and distribution of sweets in the presence of around thousand people at the stadium premises.

A total of 16 councillors were elected through the elections and, as expected, it was Nazmul Hassan Papon who got the most votes. He clinched 53 of the 57 votes from category

2 of the Dhaka Metropolitan Club category according to the unofficial results.

The other eleven elected directors for the upcoming term from category 2 are Gazi Golam Mortuza, Najib Ahmed, Mahbub Anam, Obed Nijam, Salauddin

Salaudhin Chowdhury, Monjur Alom Monju and Iftekhar Ahmed Mithu.

AJM Nasir Uddin and Akram Khan [Chattogram Division], Kazi Inam Ahmed and Sheikh Soheli [Khulna Division], Shafiqul Islam Chowdhury Nadel

18 and were elected unofficially.

However, former Bangladesh captain Khaled Mashud faced a comprehensive defeat in Rajshahi division, getting only two votes against Saiful Alam Shopon Chowdhury, who got seven of the nine votes.

There was also huge interest in category 3, where prominent coach Najmul Abedeen Fahim faced a thumping defeat from former national captain Khaled Mahmud. Mahmud received 37 votes while Fahim got just three of the 43 votes in category 3 although it was assumed it would be a closer contest.

The National Sports Council nominated Ahmed Sajjadul Alam and Jalal Yunus as directors while seven more directors in category one were elected unopposed.

The official results, which will be used to form a 25-member board of directors, will be announced after the newly elected directors exercise their voting rights and elect a new board president today. It is expected that Hassan will be given the president's post for a third consecutive term.



Chowdhury, Ismail Haider Mollick, Enayet Hossain, Monjur Kader, Monjur Alam, Fahim Sinha and Iftekhar Rahman.

The six new faces who will join the upcoming board for the next four years are Obeid Nizam, Tanvir Ahmed Tito, Fahim Sinha,

[Sylhet], Advocate Anwarul Islam [Rangpur] and Alamgir Khan Alo [Barisal Division] were uncontested in category one.

From Dhaka division, former Bangladesh captain Naimur Rahman Durjoy and Tanvir Ahmed got 16 votes each out of

## Hockey returns today with Club Cup

SPORTS REPORTER



Arch-rivals Abahani and Mohammedan will take the field today as club hockey returns to the country following a three-year hiatus through the SIBL Club Cup Hockey Tournament.

Abahani will take on Police SC in the second match of the day after Mohammedan square off against Ajax SC at the Maulana Bhashani Hockey Stadium in the opening match of the eight-team tournament.

Abahani, the defending champions boasting nine national team players, are one of the contenders for the title. The club's advisory coach Mahbub Harun expressed his optimism about retaining the title. "Abahani are defending champions and we are confident

about retaining the title," Harun told The Daily Star yesterday. "Even though the preparation time was very short, we have good players in the squad. We respect all our oppositions equally."

Arch-rivals Mohammedan, who skipped the

will definitely go for the title," Mohammedan coach Moududur Rahman Shuvo told The Daily Star. Shadharan Bima, Dilkusha, Victoria and Wari - the four other teams that are part of the 12-team Premier League, are skipping this season-opening tournament due

participate in club cup. This is a preparatory tournament for the league, so I guess those four teams may have felt they don't need preparation."

The tournament is also unlikely to see participation of foreign players or foreign umpires, organisers hinted, as visa issues of the foreigners are yet to be completed. The participating eight teams, split into two groups, will play against each of their group opponents from where the top four teams will play in the semifinals on October 14 and the winners of the semifinals will square off in the final on October 16.

The seven-lac-taka tournament will offer a prize money worth Tk 150,000 with champion team getting Tk 100,000 and runners-up team pocketing Tk 50,000.

The press conference was attended, among others, by SIBL's senior vice-president Mohammad Maniruzzaman and league committee chairman, Abdul Ahad, DC of Motijheel Police.



Club Cup last time around but clinched the Premier League, are also confident about their chances. "We have trained for around two weeks. We have a few senior national team players including (Rasel Mahmud) Jimmy. We have formed a strong squad and

to a lack of preparation and budget constraint.

Replying to a query regarding this during a pre-tournament press conference yesterday, BHF's acting general secretary Mohammad Yousuf said, "There is no binding requirement for any club to