

**We've found ways of winning games, we just couldn't find a way today [Thursday]. I hope that we've inspired young kids to pick up a bat and a ball and play cricket, and want to play for their nation and hopefully that everybody's proud of the side.**

**Jonathan Trott**  
Afghanistan head coach after their exit from T20 World Cup semifinal



## Mother's love fuels archer Sagor's Olympic dream

ANISUR RAHMAN

Under the giant steel roof at the Sheikh Russel Roller Skating Stadium in Paltan, adorned with shining banners featuring a smiling photo of archer Sagor Islam raising his index finger triumphantly, the 18-year-old archer looked radiant alongside his mother during a warm reception yesterday.

This celebration followed his outstanding achievement of qualifying directly for the upcoming Paris Olympics as the second archer and overall third athlete from Bangladesh.

Sagor, the younger child of 47-year-old Selina, lost his father at the tender age of three. However, he did not face the magnitude of hardship as anticipated, thanks to the tireless efforts of his widowed mother, Selina.

Since the demise of her husband from a brain stroke, Selina has been running a tea stall in Rajshahi for the last 15 years to support her four children, including the younger Sagor. Her dedication has now paid off in abundance, with Sagor making history in Bangladesh sports and feeling like "the

number one son in the world".

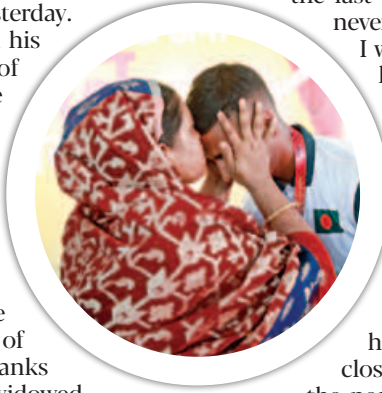
Selina has come to Dhaka for the third time, each visit related to Sagor, to witness the warm reception for her son. She recounted their journey and the challenges faced after losing her husband 15 years ago.

"Without my husband, I worked hard for the last 15 years by selling tea, but I never forced my children to work.

I wanted to raise them as good human beings by providing them with education and other facilities I could afford. My elder son completed his honours degree, while my two daughters got married.

"I never allowed Sagor to work at the tea stall. Though he was a bit fickle-minded, he loved sports. So, I kept him close by getting him admitted to the nearby SB Archery Academy in Rajshahi," said a teary-eyed Selina, who was brought to the stage along with Sagor after he was garlanded with flowers, adding that she now feels no pain from the struggles of raising Sagor as he has made the country proud with his performance.

Meanwhile, sponsor City Group handed over a reward of Tk 5 lakh for Sagor.



## A triumph soaked in tears

ASHFAQ-UL-ALAM

Since the 90s, cricket fans have come to expect three things whenever a World Cup takes place – India beating arch-rivals Pakistan, Australia running roughshod over the competition and South Africa somehow finding a way to lose in the semifinal.

Over the years, the fans have seen the once invincible Australia become more fallible, even though their trophy case remains unmatched in international cricket.

And Pakistan too got the monkey off their backs in the 2021 ICC T20 World Cup, finally defeating India by 10 wickets.

This left South Africa's inability to get over the line in semifinals as the only constant.

Before yesterday, the Proteas had suffered heartbreak in seven semifinals, the latest of which came in last year's ODI World Cup in India, when they lost to eventual champions Australia by three wickets.

This procession of misery began in 1992, during their first participation in a World



Cup after a 21-year exile from international cricket, falling victim to the later abolished rain rule, losing to England by 19 runs.

They tied against Australia in the famous 1999 semifinal but couldn't progress owing to finishing behind the Aussies in the Super Six round. More heartbreak followed in the 2007, 2015 and 2023 editions of the ODI World Cup.

South Africa's semifinal woes carried over into the T20 World Cups as well, as they lost to Pakistan and India in the 2009 and 2014 editions respectively.

The sight of South African cricketers lying on the ground, distraught, with their eyelids struggling to hold back tears after they failed to cross the final hurdle before the final once again, had become an enduring image of Protea cricket.

The fact that South Africa have managed to reach the final four in seven World Cups till 2023 is proof enough of the team's callibre. But for whatever reason, lady luck never favoured them in a semifinal ever. Now, the Proteas need just one more win to replace the 'choker' tag with 'champions'.

With the baggage of seven failed attempts weighing on them, Aiden Markram's men

entered into South Africa's eighth World Cup semifinal yesterday in Trinidad.

For their opponents, Afghanistan, this was unheralded territory, as the war-torn nation had never before made it this far in a major ICC event.

Afghanistan's inexperience at this stage was a clear advantage for the Proteas, however, keeping the ghosts of the previous failures at bay and concentrating at the task at hand, could not have been an easy task for Markram's side.

But once the action started, the mismatch in strength between the teams became apparent. The Proteas' pace attack ran through Afghanistan's defences, bowling them out for a mere 56 and the batters then completed a commanding nine-wicket win.

After fighting their way out of tricky situations right from the first round, South Africa have now made it to the final with perhaps the most dominant win in a semifinal ever. Now, the Proteas need just one more win to replace the 'choker' tag with 'champions'.

## Reflection and action needed to chase int'l level

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Bangladesh's team are set to return to country after their participation on a global event that laid bare the deficiencies in the nation's cricket cognition, team building, planning, and mental resilience.

The Tigers returned without a win in the Super Eights of the T20 World Cup, but more disastrous was their baffling approach in those three matches. The pertinent question is: where does Bangladesh cricket go from here?

The event's ninth instalment revealed the deficiencies of the players. However, in a bigger way, it exposed the flaws in how Bangladesh perceives cricket.

First, the quality of the wickets and the competitiveness of domestic competitions must be addressed. A lack of good wickets and a competitive structure makes it difficult for selectors to gauge which players have the required quality and mentality.

Surfaces here produce 140-150 scores, and in the Dhaka Premier League, teams have not been competitive. On the other hand, the franchise Bangladesh Premier League does not always allow local players to shine in pressure situations.

"No, local players are not being tested. When [Najmul Hossain] Shanto or [Towhid] Hridoy played in the top order not long ago, they were performing [for the Sylhet franchise]. Given the opportunity, our players can perform, but that opportunity is scarce," veteran coach Nazmul Abedeen Fahim, who also coached Fortune Barishal in BPL's 2022



season, told The Daily Star.

Secondly, the national coaching panel had little influence on improving the batting unit, which proved disastrous. The team appeared rudderless, not only in terms of application but also in their battle plans. Without clarity and ownership, the players failed to follow one man's idea of how the game should be played.

"I haven't seen a team that is playing as a team. Regarding team selection, or even unity within the team, it was not seen in the last two World Cups. Hathurusingha's treatment of players, especially those that don't make the side, I felt, was not very balanced," added Fahim, who has been the mentor to many

national players.

Third, the biggest factor in poor performances is bad decision making, coupled with a significant deficiency in cricketing IQ. "Where are our players learning the game and from whom?" asks Fahim.

Coaching education is still far behind in the country, and Fahim feels that this is where reflection is needed to help players learn the nuances of the game. However, for the immediate needs of the national team players, they need to be allowed to play in foreign leagues.

"Ask Shakib where he was influenced the most as a cricketer. He will say it's county cricket where his biggest change came. It's unbelievable what playing for

Sussex means. Look at Afghanistan. They are building their players by playing them outside.

"What's our goal? We have to do a lot of things so that in two years we are prepared for the 2026 T20 World Cup. So if Taskin [Ahmed] goes here and there, playing franchise cricket or county cricket, it has to be avoided. It has to happen irrespective of what's happening to the national team," he said.

The need for another T20 tournament has come on the radar, and Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) is set to introduce a new T20 tournament. Fahim, however, believes more lower-tier tournaments need to be introduced.

"For instance, the Chattogram division can hold a tournament, and there, players who are still in the lower tiers in the nook and corner of the country can participate. You will see that many players with a T20 mindset will come through. There used to be the Star Summer tournament, and districts will get sponsors. It doesn't have to be like the BPL. It would be a platform for player development," he said.

As it stands, Bangladesh has a long way to go to catch up to the international level, and BCB must take bold and blunt decisions following extensive soul-searching, for a change.

However, if making the Super Eights is something BCB uses to beat their own drums, leading to not holding the coaching staff accountable for sub-par preparations, things are certain to remain the same, if not regress beyond repair.

## Brazil seek improvement against Paraguay

REUTERS

Brazil face Paraguay in their Copa America Group D match in Las Vegas on Saturday (7:00 am Bangladesh Time) after a disappointing goalless draw against lowly Costa Rica in their opener left the five-time World Cup winners questioning how to sharpen their cutting edge.

A wasteful Brazil side dominated possession but were clueless on how to beat an ultra-defensive Costa Rica playing with a back five.

Paraguay, who lost 2-1 to Colombia in their first game, are expected to use a similar defensive game plan to Costa Rica.

That will pose another challenge for Brazil's 62-year-old manager Dorival Jr who will have to find answers on how his side can break deadlocks. Attacking midfielder Lucas Paqueta, one of Brazil's most active players against Costa Rica with five shots that missed the target and one that hit the post, believes Brazil can bounce back.

"It's clear that finishing from outside the area against teams who close down and defend deep is something that we can improve, but we are still very confident that we will," Paqueta said on Wednesday.

There is no indication Dorival will make any changes against Paraguay despite the growing pressure from fans and media who are eager to see teenage sensation Endrick starting alongside his future Real Madrid team mates Vinicius Jr and Rodrygo up front.

The 17-year-old striker Endrick was Brazil's hero in Dorival's first two games in charge earlier this year.

Dorival does not want to rush the teenager into a starting role but after a run of five straight games without a win in competitive matches, Brazil's worst record in 23 years, the manager could soon be forced to listen to the crowd.

## EURO LAST 16

### Faltering stars and unbowed underdogs

AFP, Gelsenkirchen

Euro 2024's last 16 match-ups were confirmed on Wednesday night after Georgia snatched a spot in the knockout stage for the first time in their history with a stunning 2-0 win over Portugal.

As it turns out, the round of 16 will see some of the tournament heavyweights line up alongside ambitious underdogs, promising something special. Here, we look at each match-up along with their schedule in Bangladesh time.

**Switzerland v Italy (June 29, 10:00 pm)**

Italy head into Saturday's clash with Switzerland in Berlin still a work in progress after scraping into second place seconds before the end of their final Group B game with Croatia.

The defending champions will be wary of the Swiss, who will likely have four Serie A players in their starting line-up and showed in their 1-1 draw with Germany that they are perfectly capable of giving the big boys a bloody nose.

**Germany v Denmark (June 30, 1:00 am)**  
Revitalised under Julian Nagelsmann, Germany have been alongside Spain as

the best team in the group stages and will rightly be considered favourites against Denmark, who laboured to second place in the dismal Group C behind England.

Denmark coach Kasper Hjulmand said that his team always "step up" when facing the big nations but Germany will also have the backing of Dortmund's famous Westfalenstadion on Saturday night as they seek a record-breaking fourth Euros title.

**England v Slovakia (June 30, 10:00 pm)**  
England have had a soft landing against Slovakia on Sunday after topping Group C despite putting in three hugely disappointing displays against middling opposition.

Coach Gareth Southgate was pelted with plastic cups by frustrated fans after Tuesday's goalless draw with Slovenia and performances will have to pick up if his team are to live up to their billing as one of the pre-tournament favourites.

**Spain v Georgia (July 1, 1:00 am)**  
Luis de la Fuente's side have been the most impressive team of the tournament so far after breezing through the supposedly tough Group B with a perfect nine points and a statement win over the Italians.



**Georgia's Khvicha Kvaratskhelia celebrates scoring their first goal in their stunning 2-0 victory over Portugal in a Euro 2024 group game on Wednesday.**

PHOTO: AFP

With almost their entire first XI, including star wingers Lamine Yamal and Nico Williams, rested in Monday's 1-0 win over Albania, anything other than straightforward passage into the quarters for Spain would be a massive shock in

Cologne on Sunday.

However, Georgia are this tournament's fairytale and showed by beating Portugal on Wednesday they can spring an upset.

**France v Belgium (July 1, 10:00 pm)**

Possibly the most intriguing tie of the round sees two big teams yet to hit form face off in Dusseldorf on Monday.

France were unimpressive in qualifying in second place from Group D. Kylian Mbappe is the only player in Didier Deschamps' side to score a goal and that strike came from the penalty spot in a 1-1 draw with already-eliminated Poland.

Belgium meanwhile have played well in bursts but were barracked by fans in Stuttgart on Wednesday after a safety-first approach against Ukraine saw them edge into the last 16 from Group E.

**Portugal v Slovenia (July 2, 1:00 am)**

Portugal will be heavy favourites to get past Slovenia in Frankfurt on Monday night and coach Roberto Martinez will have a mostly rested first XI to call upon after making a raft of changes for Wednesday's defeat to Georgia which made no difference to the Group F winners.

Slovenia didn't impress in Group

C, finishing third and scoring twice in three matches, but Matjaz Kek's team are unbeaten in nine games and beat Portugal 2-0 in a pre-tournament friendly.

**Romania v Netherlands (July 2, 10:00 pm)**

The Dutch were hugely disappointing in Group D, finishing third behind Austria and France, and should be wary on Tuesday of Romania who are in the last 16 for the first time in 24 years after topping a tight Group E.

However, Ronald Koeman, who called his team "appalling" after losing 3-2 to Austria, has been rewarded for their underwhelming displays by being placed on the easier side of the knockout bracket where off-colour England and an unsure Italy are the only heavyweights.

**Austria v Turkey (July 3, 1:00 am)**

Ralf Rangnick's Austria have been given the dangerous tag of tournament dark horse after topping Group D ahead of France and the Dutch, playing some exciting football in the process. Tuesday night's match with Turkey in Leipzig promises to be an entertaining affair with Vincenzo Montella's talented side being backed by huge support at every match.