

# RIVALS DECIDE TIGERS' DESTINY

EKUSH TAPADER FROM ABU DHABI

As the Asia Cup group stage draws to a close, Bangladesh find themselves in an all-too-familiar position: waiting on others; calculators and equations in hand.

Their narrow win over Afghanistan on Tuesday kept hopes alive, but their fate in the eight-team competition no longer rests in their own hands. To reach the next round, Super Four, the Tigers must rely on Sri Lanka, a side who beat them convincingly earlier in the tournament.

Since 2018, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have forged a modern-day rivalry, fiery on the field and spiced off it with the famous "Nagin dance" exchanges. Yet today, all that matters for Bangladesh is that the islanders prevail against the Afghans in Abu Dhabi.

If Sri Lanka win, the calculations end there. If they lose, only a heavy defeat will give the Tigers the door to sneak through.

Yesterday afternoon, the Bangladesh players et out on their 150-kilometre journey from Abu Dhabi to Dubai. Some carried their



Sri Lanka and Afghanistan squared off in eight T20Is, with the Lankans winning five and the rest three going in the Afghans' favour.

Sri Lanka, however, lost their recent T20I clash against Afghanistan -- a three-run defeat in Dambulla in February last year.

Meanwhile, in Asia Cup T20 contests, both teams have one wins each in their two meetings so far.

Interestingly, Afghanistan have never won chasing 150-plus against any Test-playing Asian nations in T20Is.



like this is tough. We've been here before. Our fate is in our own hands," he said.

That's what makes the Abu Dhabi fixture one of those rare moments multi-nation tournaments produce. Two sides fighting for survival, while a third watches nervously from afar. The stakes ripple across borders -- Bangladesh contingent and fans in Dubai; their fans back home; even neutrals following the drama of the Asia Cup.

For now, Bangladesh's hopes ride on their rivals. It is a strange alliance, but cricket often serves up such twists. Should Sri Lanka win, Bangladesh will live to fight another day -- and perhaps even meet the islanders again in the Super Four.

One day of friendship. The next, back to claws and fangs; courtesy for competition. The irony isn't lost. A team humbled by Sri Lanka earlier in the tournament, and who would normally relish seeing them stumble, are now forced to pin their hopes on those very rivals.

Like a T20 match, the colours keep changing.

## TIGERS' SUPER FOUR EQUATION

A win for Sri Lanka against Afghanistan at the Zayed Cricket Stadium in Abu Dhabi tonight will ensure Bangladesh's progress to Super Four of the Asia Cap as runners-up from Group B. Sri Lanka would qualify as group champions

However, in case of an Afghanistan victory, the margin would need to be a big one for Bangladesh to progress alongside Rashid Khan and Co.

If Afghanistan bat first, they would need to beat the Lankans by 65 or more runs to help the Tigers' cause.

If Afghanistan chase, then Bangladesh's only hope would be if Afghanistan reach the target with 50 balls to spare, as that would push Sri Lanka below the Tigers in net run rate.

However, just a victory for Afghanistan would mean Sri Lanka and Afghanistan progress.



## Jayasuriya's calm vs Bangladesh's coaching void

EKUSH TAPADER FROM ABU DHABI

Sanath Jayasuriya's transformation from explosive opener to calm, measured coach has reshaped Sri Lanka's dressing room. His adaptability, once seen in the way he revolutionised ODI Powerplay batting, now shows in the freedom and confidence he instills in his players. Under his guidance, youngsters like Kamil Mishara are thriving with clarity and assurance. In stark contrast, Bangladesh continue to search for such leadership among their own coaches. Despite figures like Mohammad Salahuddin earning domestic acclaim, no local coach has truly impacted the national side. Even after 25 years of Test status, Bangladesh's coaching void remains unfilled.

**\*\*Read full story on The Daily Star's website**

## Nasum soars under pressure

EKUSH TAPADER FROM ABU DHABI

On Wednesday, security guards at Abu Dhabi's Park Rotana Hotel, where the Bangladesh players are residing, did not allow media lenses inside. While the touring journalists were wondering what to do, Nasum Ahmed, the Tigers savior from the night before against Afghanistan, appeared outside on the roadside with a bandaged thumb.

Bangladeshi cricketers are often heavily influenced by social media, and Nasum is no exception.

Just before the Asia Cup, discussions around his personal matters on social media were troubling him. As one-sided comments fueled a social media trial against him, he expressed his frustrations to close ones but chose to respond with silence.

Upon arriving in the UAE, he threw



**In an international career spanning four-and-half years, Nasum feels he has already written a few comeback stories.**

himself into training, knowing fully well that he will not get picked in the XI from the start, but whenever the chance came, he had to give everything as failure would only worsen the trolling.

He walked onto the field against

Afghanistan on Tuesday for his first match in this year's Asia Cup, carrying a mountain of pressure. For the Tigers too, it was a do-or-die contest as a defeat would seal their exit from the tournament.

Defending 154 runs, the left-arm spinner bowled the first over and gave Bangladesh an ideal start. His first delivery skidded a bit, the seam making it look like a pacer's in-swing, and struck left-hander Sedikullah Atal on the pads, who didn't even bother to review after being adjudged LBW.

Nasum then bowled five dot deliveries on the trot to turn it into a maiden wicket over, putting the Afghan batters under

pressure straight away. He ended the night with two wickets for just 11 runs in four overs, earning the player-of-the-match award.

The 30-year-old had hurt his right thumb while trying to stop a ball in the match. That same finger was wrapped in a temporary bandage the next day. When asked about his condition before leaving for Dubai, he said, "Yes, there was pain, but now it's okay. Hopefully it won't be a problem."

During the ICC World Cup in 2023, his name got tangled in an incident involving head coach Chandika Hathurusingha. Since then, his white-ball career has drifted off a bit, him getting called up for one series but getting discarded in the next.

In an international career spanning four-and-half years, Nasum feels he has already written a few comeback stories. But considering the context and circumstances, this one felt extra special, "No, there were quite a few like this before. But yesterday was a little more special. Yesterday was a do-or-die match for us. That's why it feels extra special."

He has to live with the constant uncertainty of being in and out of the squad. If the team doesn't play an extra spinner, he usually doesn't get into the XI. For Nasum, the challenge has always been to stay ready, "To tell the truth, I'm always prepared to play. Whenever the chance comes, I try to give my best. Alhamdulillah, sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't, but for this I give countless thanks to Allah that I could perform like this."



## U-17s start SAFF campaign against Nepal

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's bid to regain the title of the regional youth championship begins today in Sri Lanka, where the men in red and green will face Nepal in their opening group match of the SAFF Under-17 Championship in Colombo, with the match kicking off at 7:30 pm (Bangladesh time).

Since their triumph in the U-15 youth championship in 2018, two-time champions Bangladesh have remained trophyless despite reaching the finals of both the U-16 and U-17 championships in 2023 and 2024.

Nepal began their campaign strongly, securing a 2-0 victory over Sri Lanka on the opening day of the tournament on Monday.

In previous youth tournaments, Nepal have had a slight edge over Bangladesh, beating them three times, losing twice, and drawing once in six meetings. Therefore, this encounter will not be an easy task for Bangladesh, a fact well recognised by captain Nazmul Huda Faisal.

"Nepal are always strong opponents but we are ready and committed to giving our 100 percent."



Dusan Vlahovic celebrates after scoring Juventus' second goal in their Champions League opener at home against Borussia Dortmund on Tuesday. The Serbian striker and English defender Lloyd Kelly scored in stoppage time to inspire a dramatic Juventus escape as they secured a 4-4 draw, with all eight goals coming in the second half. The hosts trailed 4-2 when substitute Vlahovic grabbed his second of the night in the fourth minute of stoppage time, before he set up Kelly two minutes later to secure a point.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Haaland eyes fastest UCL 50, Newcastle brace for Barcelona

STAR SPORTS DESK

Matchday 1 of the Champions League group stage resumes on Thursday with another round of high-profile clashes across Europe. Manchester City's meeting with Napoli and Newcastle's showdown against Barcelona headline the night, while elsewhere Sporting CP host Kazakhstan's Kairat Almaty and Frankfurt face Galatasaray. Early kick-offs see Club Brugge welcome Monaco and Copenhagen take on Bayer Leverkusen

**Manchester City vs Napoli**

All eyes will be on Erling Haaland as Manchester City prepare for their Champions League opener against Napoli. The Norwegian has scored 49 goals in 48 appearances in the competition and is on the brink of becoming the 10th player to reach the landmark of 50 goals, potentially the fastest ever, beating Ruud van Nistelrooy's record (62 matches).

Haaland arrives in red-hot form, having netted five goals for Norway

during the international break and following it up with a derby brace in City's 3-0 win over Manchester United. The 25-year-old already has five goals in four Premier League games this season.

City are unbeaten in their last 21 home group-stage matches (W18 D3), scoring three or more in 13 of their last 16. Pep Guardiola, however, has a negative record against Napoli coach Antonio Conte, losing four of their seven managerial meetings.

The night will also mark a poignant return for Kevin De Bruyne, who left City this summer after a decade of service, joining Napoli on a free transfer. The Belgian racked up 108 goals, 170 assists, and 16 major trophies in 422 appearances during his time in Manchester.

City have the upper hand historically against Napoli, winning both games in 2017-18 after going winless in their first two meetings in 2011-12. Napoli, meanwhile, have never won away to an English club in European competition (P12 W0 D3 L9).



**Newcastle vs Barcelona**

At St James' Park, Newcastle return to Champions League action without former star Alexander Isak, who moved to Liverpool in the summer. Eddie Howe's side lack proven firepower at this level, with only Joelinton, Dan Burn, and Fabian Schar among their current players to have scored in the competition.

Summer signing Nick Woltemade has offered early promise, scoring the winner against Wolves at

the weekend. Youssef En-Nesyri and Anthony Elanga could also be decisive additions, although injuries persist with Jacob Ramsey sidelined.

Barcelona, meanwhile, arrive without teenage sensation Lamine Yamal, who suffered a groin injury on international duty. Alejandro Balde, Gavi, and Marc-Andre ter Stegen are also absent, though Frenkie de Jong is fit.

Despite the setbacks, Hansi Flick's side retain attacking menace. Raphinha, who was involved in a competition-high 21 goals last season (13 goals, 8 assists), will be central to Barca's chances. Striker Robert Lewandowski has scored nine goals in his last seven appearances in the league phase of the Champions League, while Raphinha found the net 16 times in his last 16 games in this competition.

Newcastle have managed just one win in their last eight Champions League outings (D3 L4), while Barcelona look to lay down an early marker in their quest to reclaim European glory.