

## Individual brilliances light up friendlies

Florian Wirtz produced a masterclass with two goals and two assists as Germany edged Switzerland 4-3 in a thrilling friendly in Basel yesterday. Switzerland twice led through Dan Ndoye and Brel Embolo but Wirtz orchestrated Germany's response each time - setting up Jonathan Tah's first international goal and Serge Gnabry's equaliser. He then took centre stage, curling in a superb

strike to make it 3-2 before sealing victory with another stunning effort after Joel Monteiro had levelled.

In Buenos Aires, Argentina secured a tense 2-1 win over Mauritania. Enzo Fernandez opened the scoring before 21-year-old Nico Paz netted his first international goal with a left-footed free kick. Mauritania rallied late, with Jordan Lefort pulling one back,

despite Lionel Messi's second-half introduction.

Elsewhere, England drew 1-1 with Uruguay at home as Ben White scored but conceded a late penalty converted by Federico Valverde, while Spain beat Serbia 3-0, with Mikel Oyarzabal scoring twice thanks to two superb finishes and debutant Victor Munoz also on target at home.



PHOTOS: FACEBOOK/REUTERS



74 DAYS TO GO



### Gazzaniga's masterpiece

When Brazil lifted their third World Cup title at the 1970 edition in Mexico, it was more than just another triumph, it marked the end of an era. By winning the title for a third time, Brazil earned the right to keep the iconic Jules Rimet Trophy forever. That historic moment created an unexpected challenge for world football. With the original prize - designed for the inaugural edition in 1930 - claimed, FIFA needed a new symbol of the game's greatest achievement ahead of the 1974 World Cup. What followed was a global search for a design worthy of football's grandest stage. Artists from seven countries submitted 53 different proposals, each attempting to capture the spirit and prestige of the World Cup. In the end, it was Italian sculptor Silvio Gazzaniga whose vision stood above the rest - a design that would go on to become one of the most recognisable trophies in all of sport.

\*\*Visit The Daily Star website to also read "The Iceman's masterpiece: When Bergkamp painted history in three touches".

### Cabrera & Co hoping for win against Singapore

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh head coach Javier Cabrera and his players believe they have the ability to beat Singapore in their final AFC Asian Cup Qualifiers fixture on Tuesday and salvage some pride by finishing the campaign in second position.

Bangladesh, currently third in the four-team Group C, have five points from five matches, while Singapore have already secured the lone qualifying spot from the group with 11 points. Hong Kong have eight while India are at the bottom with two.

The team arrived in Singapore on Thursday following a 3-0 defeat in a FIFA friendly away to Vietnam. The loss was a bruising one against the reigning Southeast Asian champions, but Cabrera believes the experience will stand his side in good stead ahead of the match at the National Stadium in Kallang.

"We wanted to have that tough test before coming here. Vietnam was a strong challenge. The result was disappointing, but I think



there were many positives to take. It was a very important experience against a much higher-ranked team," Cabrera said in a video message sent by the Bangladesh Football Federation on Friday, after the team's first training session in Singapore.

Midfielder Sheikh Morsalin, who was an unused substitute against Vietnam, believes the team will learn from their mistakes. Bangladesh were trailing 3-0 within the first 38 minutes, but an improved second-half display helped them avoid a heavier defeat.

"We had our expectations in Vietnam. We played well in the second half and even tried to dominate. So we will try to correct those mistakes with the aim of winning this match," Morsalin said.

Bangladesh lost to both Singapore (1-2) and Hong Kong (3-4), but beat India (1-0) at home. In contrast, Cabrera's charges have fared slightly better away from home, drawing both their matches against India (0-0) and Hong Kong (1-1). Their performances on the road have also shown more cohesion and spirit, something Morsalin believes they can carry into this match.

"There will be pressure, but our objective is to finish second with a win, as we have done well away from home. Victory is our only target," said the Bangladesh No. 7.

Cabrera echoed that belief, saying his team can get a positive result if they play to their full potential.

"If we take the best things from the match against Vietnam, I think we are going to be very competitive against Singapore," the Spaniard said. "If we are at our best and can improve on the small details - especially set-pieces, where we had some issues in the first game - it's going to be a very tight match, and we can get the three points."

## National athletes set for financial boost

SPORTS REPORTER

**Youth and Sports state minister Aminul Haque yesterday announced 129 national athletes will begin receiving a monthly financial allowance. The support will be officially inaugurated during Monday's ceremony at the Prime Minister's Office, where honorary 'Sports Cards' will also be distributed to those who achieved international success in 2025. While cricketers are largely excluded due to their existing financial stability, the scheme is expected to expand rapidly to support 500 athletes across various disciplines, including para-sports and grassroots talents.**

**Financial security:** The programme is designed to turn sports into a viable career path, easing the financial burden on athletes' families.

**Diverse representation:** The initial phase covers 20 different disciplines, ranging from sepak takraw to carom and yoga.

**Inclusive approach:** Para-athletes are being given "highest importance" in this scheme, acknowledging their recent international achievements.

**Merit-based & equal:** Allowances are uniform across all sports to ensure equal respect; however, status and performance will be reviewed every four months.

**Expansion plans:** The scheme will soon grow to include 500 beneficiaries, alongside the launch of the 'Notun Kuri Sports' initiative in April to scout grassroots talent aged 12-14 across all 64 districts.



When sports become a profession, families gain security. With this vision, we are bringing national-level athletes under an allowance programme to ensure they can focus entirely on their performance... It will be a satisfactory figure that will motivate athletes to perform better, while also encouraging families to support their children in sports.

Aminul Haque, State Minister for Youth and Sports

### SHORT CORNER

#### Dhoni to miss start of IPL season due to calf strain

Mahendra Singh Dhoni is expected to miss the opening two weeks of the Indian Premier League (IPL) season, the Chennai Super Kings said on Saturday. The 44-year-old, who led Chennai to five titles before relinquishing the captaincy in 2024, featured in all 14 of their matches last season, scoring a total of 196 runs as they finished bottom of the standings.

#### Ignore our celebrations, we respect Bosnian team: Dimarco

Federico Dimarco insisted on Saturday that Italy respect Bosnia and Herzegovina, after he and team-mates were caught on camera celebrating when their opponents reached the World Cup qualifying final by beating Wales. Italy will attempt to end their World Cup exile when they meet Bosnia and Herzegovina on Tuesday in Zenica.

\*\*Read full stories on The Daily Star website.



## Fahim, Ronan help Bangladesh turn corner in India draw

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh came from behind to hold India to a 1-1 draw in their final Group B match of the SAFF U-20 Championship in Male yesterday, with Group A champions Nepal awaiting them in Wednesday's semifinals.

Both sides finished on four points, with India topping the three-team group on goal difference, while Bangladesh advanced as runners-up.

At Maldives' National Stadium, defending champions India took the lead in the 17th minute through Vishal Yadav, who headed in from an Omang Dodum corner. Bangladesh, already assured of a last-four spot, struggled to match India's control early on, with coach Mark Cox's side forced into a reshuffle after Ashikur Rahman went off injured midway through the first half.

The game grew increasingly physical, with multiple scuffles disrupting play and leading to the dismissals of Cox and India goalkeeping coach Sandeep Nandi from the dugout.

Bangladesh found their response deep into first-half stoppage time, once again through the influence of Ronan Sullivan. The 18-year-old Philadelphia Union Academy forward, who had struck a decisive brace against Pakistan in the opener, proved pivotal yet again with his delivery - whipping in a teasing, swerving corner that Abdul Riyad Fahim met with a composed far-post volley to restore parity.

India enjoyed the better of the second half and created clearer chances, with Dodum going close on more than one occasion, but Bangladesh held firm despite lacking a cutting edge in attack.