DHAKA THURSDAY NOVEMBER 12, 2026, KARTIK 27, 1433 BS

# SPORT



**I'm not calling for anything. All I've ever wanted for us is to take accountability as a team. This has never been a witch hunt for me, it's only been those three guys who've had to cop this flak for a long time.**

**USMAN KHAWAJA**, former Australia batter about Sandpapergate



**Farhaan Ali Wahid is ecstatic following his scintillating goal against Sri Lanka in Bangladesh's SAFF Championship fixture at the National Stadium in Dhaka on Wednesday. Shamit Shome, Hamza Choudhury and Rakib Hossain scored the other goals in a 4-0 rout.** PHOTO: **FIROZ AHMED**

## Scoring burden shared in emphatic response

**TANVIR AHMED PRANTO**

The absence of a prolific, out-and-out number nine had been a talking point surrounding Bangladesh ahead of their SAFF Championship campaign. But by the time the hosts had completed a 4-0 rout against Sri Lanka at the National Stadium yesterday, they had offered a convincing answer to that concern: goals do not necessarily have to come from the centre-forward.

Bangladesh found four different routes to goal on the day, as Shamit Shome, captain Hamza Choudhury, Farhaan Ali Wahid and Rakib Hossain all got on the scoresheet. Rather than relying on a traditional goalscorer to carry the attacking burden, the hosts drew on the movement and finishing ability of their midfielders and wide forwards.

Mohammad Ibrahim, who scored in the first game against Bhutan, offered a physical presence up front, keeping the central defenders occupied and creating room for players arriving from deeper positions. He also put himself about, taking a blow to the head in the 31st minute before challenging goalkeeper Sujan Perera for the ball in the 65th.

Shamit was perhaps the clearest example of Bangladesh's collective approach. Operating alongside Quazem Shah Kirmanee in a double pivot, his primary responsibility was to provide defensive cover and help win possession. He showed that side of his game in the 11th minute, tracking back to stop Adhavan Rajamohan after the Sri Lankan forward had found space centrally.

But Shamit also demonstrated that his influence was not restricted to defensive duties. In the eighth minute, he arrived in the box at the right time to turn home the rebound after Perera failed to hold Hamza's cross from the right. His willingness to move forward and support attacks, while maintaining his defensive responsibilities, gave Thomas Dooley's charges another dimension in midfield.

**SEMIFINAL LINE-UP**

**1st Semifinal:** India vs Bhutan, 14 Nov, 3:00 pm

**2nd Semifinal:** Bangladesh vs Pakistan, 14 Nov, 8:30 pm

The left flank, meanwhile, provided a different source of danger. Farhaan stretched the Sri Lankan defence with his direct running and ability to take on defenders, while Shamit's movement offered support. Their combination created problems for the visitors, with Farhaan also heading a diagonal delivery back into the danger area in the 25th minute, allowing Hamza to attempt a back-flick that narrowly cleared the crossbar.

Picking up the ball on the left, Farhaan beat his marker, and then two more with close control of the ball, cut inside onto his right foot and fired towards goal, with his effort taking a deflection off a defender before finding the net.

Hamza, meanwhile, was the driving force behind much of Bangladesh's play. The new captain was vocal in demanding greater intensity from his teammates, while also looking to influence the attack. After an early free-kick and a long-range effort failed to find the target, he produced the decisive moment just before half-time, beating his marker from the left before unleashing a powerful shot that went in off Perera's knee.

Rakib added the finishing touch in the 87th minute, driving the final nail into the coffin of now-eliminated Sri Lanka as he raced through on a counter-attack before delicately lifting the ball over the advancing goalkeeper.

With the attacking responsibility shared across midfield and the flanks, the hosts, chasing their second SAFF title in 23 years, will hope this performance marks a platform for an even sterner test in their semifinal against Pakistan on November 14.

## 'What do we currently have for women's cricket?'

**Following disappointing campaigns in the Asia Cup and Asian Games, veteran coach Sarwar Imran lost his position as head coach of the Bangladesh women's team and was replaced by David Hemp. Sarwar, who guided the Bangladesh men's team in their inaugural Test in 2000, spoke to The Daily Star's Samsul Arefin Khan about his experience, regrets and concerns over the state of women's cricket in Bangladesh. The excerpts are as follows:**

**The Daily Star (DS): How would you describe your experience as Bangladesh women's head coach?**

Sarwar Imran (SI): We won two matches at the T20 World Cup in England and performed reasonably well in two others. However, after poor performances in the Asia Cup and Asian Games, the situation changed. I may have made one or two comments that did not go down well with the board, and David Hemp replaced me. I tried my best to bring the team up to the standard of Test-playing nations, but fitness remained a major obstacle.

**DS: Why has women's cricket struggled to improve its competitiveness and fitness?**

**SI:** Our biggest problem is the lack of competition. Beyond 14 or 15 players, we do not have enough players of a similar standard. Established players know their places are almost guaranteed, so they feel little pressure to improve. The ongoing National Cricket League T20 is an example. There are hardly any significant performances, and we lack players capable of challenging the national squad members.

Also, bringing in foreign trainers is not automatically the solution. A good trainer must push players beyond their comfort zones and demand improvement. Being liked by everyone does not necessarily mean someone is doing a good job.

**DS: What problems did you face within the team?**

**SI:** My assistant coaches were reluctant to intervene or put players under pressure, so I had to handle most of those responsibilities myself. Perhaps they were afraid of scolding female players or demanding too much from them.

**DS: Did internal controversies affect team environment?**

**SI:** Definitely. There were several issues involving the captain that made the environment unstable. Coaches perhaps remained silent



on certain matters out of fear.

**DS: Has Nigar Sultana Joty's captaincy influenced team selection?**

**SI:** It would be unfair to hold Joty solely responsible. Selectors and coaches also have important roles in team selection. The captain can express a preference when two players compete for the same position, but that is different from having the authority to select the team.

**DS: What is needed to develop the next generation of players?**

**SI:** We must strengthen the pipeline through school and Under-18 cricket. We also need quality coaches specifically for women's cricket, including female coaches. Without proper infrastructure, we cannot expect to beat Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Australia or India. Their investment and facilities show how seriously they support women's cricket.

**DS: Why has our batting failed to progress?**

**SI:** Eight or nine teams play in the Women's Premier League, but only the top four are genuinely competitive. Players score runs against weaker teams and then expect national selection. We need to reduce the Premier League to six or seven competitive teams and ensure regular competitions at every level, including First Division and Premier League.

We simply do not play enough cricket. We occasionally beat Pakistan and Sri Lanka, but if things continue this way, Scotland and Ireland could eventually start beating us.

**DS: Why have the Tigresses made little progress since winning the Asia Cup in 2018?**

**SI:** We need facilities similar to those developed for men's cricket, such as the infrastructure at Mirpur. What do we currently have for women's cricket? While preparing for the Asia Cup and Asian Games, we were sent to the Cricketers' Academy. There was no indoor facility or suitable training arrangement for the rainy season in August.

**DS: What is your biggest regret from your tenure?**

**SI:** What hurts me most is that only around half of our first eleven have good fitness levels. These are our main players, yet I could not address the problem. It may take another three or four years to get things right.

## Only problem is food: India coach

**SPORTS REPORTER**

Despite securing a SAFF Championship semifinal berth with consecutive wins over Pakistan and Maldives, India coach Naushad Moosa has expressed dissatisfaction with the food provided in Dhaka.

Speaking after Wednesday's 1-0 victory against Maldives at the National Stadium, Moosa noted that while general hospitality is fine, the daily repetition of meals is problematic for players requiring proper post-match nutrition.



"Hospitality-wise, everything has been fine. The only problem we are facing is with the food," Moosa said. "After a game, players need good food. On matchdays, they don't eat much before the game, so they need a proper meal afterwards. But when we go there, it's the same food every day."

These remarks align with widespread social media criticism regarding the tournament's food and accommodation arrangements. Maldives coach Istvan Urbanyi echoed these sentiments post-match, stating that current provisions fall short of the standards set by previous SAFF events.

The complaints have highlighted the tournament's administrative divide. While SAFF is the primary organizer and the BFF provides logistical support, TSA Sports and Entertainment holds the commercial rights and manages team travel and accommodation.

Moosa confirmed that while breakfast issues have been resolved, India's team management is still negotiating improvements for lunch and dinner. Additionally, he clarified that the squad has encountered no security issues in Dhaka, though players have been restricted from exploring the city.





## Italy host France in Nations League

**STAR SPORTS DESK**

Two European giants collide on Thursday evening at Milan's iconic San Siro as Italy host France in their penultimate UEFA Nations League Group A1 fixture tonight.

Following a 1-1 stalemate in Paris earlier this campaign, top spot is at stake. Les Bleus sit atop the standings with 10 points from four matches. Aside from dropping two points against the Azzurri, Zinedine Zidane's tenure has been nearly flawless, featuring two victories over Belgium and another against Turkey. A win at San Siro will officially secure first place and quarterfinal qualification before they host Turkey on Sunday in Bordeaux.

However, uncertainty looms over Kylian Mbappe. The 27-year-old France captain and Real Madrid forward, who missed France's last three fixtures through injury, did not train with the team yesterday.

Roberto Mancini's Italy sit second with seven points, rebounding from an opening 2-0 defeat to Belgium with two wins and a draw. Currently occupying a knockout-stage berth, the Azzurri hold a precarious one-point edge over Belgium, whom they visit next in a potentially decisive finale.

While both nations secured 3-1 away victories against each other in the 2024–25 Nations League, France lead 4-2 in their head-to-head record since their shootout heartbreak in the 2006 World Cup final.

## Bavuma wary of Tigers' 'fast bowling resource'

**STAR SPORTS DESK**

South Africa captain Temba Bavuma warned his team to prepare for Bangladesh's fast-bowling resources ahead of their two-match Test series, starting November 15. .

Bavuma noted their 2024 series sweep in Bangladesh sparked the momentum that culminated in their maiden World Test Championship (WTC) title in the last cycle.

"That series against Bangladesh in Bangladesh was pivotal in our journey or quest to get into the WTC final. It gave us a lot of confidence as a group and also individually," Bavuma told SuperSport.

Yet, he insists complacency has no place against the Tigers. "I look at the venues that we'll be playing, the Bangladesh team, the Highveld [in southern Africa], and we know how it offers assistance for fast



bowling. And I think they have that resource in terms of fast bowling," he said.

Bangladesh's pace squad includes Taskin Ahmed, Hasan Mahmud, Shoriful Islam, Ebadot Hossain, and Khaled Ahmed, while the Proteas have six pacers in their ranks – including Kagiso Rabada, Anrich Nortje, Marco Jansen – to dismantle the Tigers' batting lineup.

The visitors face a daunting historical barrier, having lost all eight previous Tests in South Africa. The opening Test marks Bangladesh's debut at Johannesburg's Wanderers Stadium, with the second beginning November 23 at Centurion's SuperSport Park.

To counter the bowling threat, Bavuma stressed his batters must be flawless.

"So from a batting point of view, I mean, we'll have to make sure that we tick that box in terms of our preparation and mentally not take anything to chance," Bavuma said.

"I think now you look across the world, there's no team that's an easy team. You know, teams on their day can put teams under pressure. And I think you want to make sure that you're not caught with your pants down."

## WHAT TO WATCH

**T SPORTS**

Pakistan vs Sri Lanka
1st Test, Day four
Live from 10:30 am

**SONY SPORTS 1, 2, 5**

ACC U-19 Asia Cup
Semifinals
Bangladesh vs Pakistan
India vs Afghanistan
Live from 11:00 am

UEFA Nations League
Italy vs France
Live from 1:45 am (Friday)
England vs Croatia
Live from 1:45 am (Friday)
Czechia vs Spain
Live from 1:45 am (Friday)