DHAKA SUNDAY NOVEMBER 15, 2026, KARTIK 30, 1433 BS

SPORT



"I want to have a great day. I'm happy to be here for the start of this wonderful story. The president dreams of something big for Ravenna, and being a part of it makes me happy."

Ronaldinho on his return to professional football



Hamza Choudhury holds his head in anguish after Bangladesh's 1-0 defeat against Pakistan in the SAFF Championship semifinal at the National Stadium in Dhaka yesterday. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Bangladesh's familiar failure

TANVIR AHMED PRANTO

The flares were burning, the players were crumbling and Bangladesh's latest shot at glory was going up in smoke. As the National Stadium descended into chaos on Saturday night, youngsters Zayyan Ahmed and Farhaan Ali Wahid wept on the touchline. Bangladesh had found another way to fall short when it mattered most.

A 1-0 semifinal defeat to Pakistan extended their title drought and denied them a first final appearance in the SAFF Championship since 2005. Abdul Samad Shahzad's 86th-minute strike, slipping through goalkeeper Mehedi Hasan Srabon's hands settled the contest, after the goalkeeper's ill-advised and ill-directed attempt at launching a counter-attack spectacularly backfired. But Srabon's error was only the final blow in a performance riddled with deeper failures.

Bangladesh had frozen long before that. Against a Pakistan side whose domestic league has not completed a season since 2018-19, the hosts looked short of composure, accuracy and ideas. Their tentative passing and predictable build-up bore little resemblance to the side that had swept aside Sri Lanka 4-0.

Head coach Thomas Dooley admitted his players never settled under the weight of expectation.

"We had to win this game against Pakistan. But we didn't come into the game," he said, explaining how early mistakes bred nervousness and disrupted their passing.

Pakistan, meanwhile, looked more assured. Dooley conceded they had "a little bit more knowledge about football, when to run, how to run, how to touch the ball, how to pass the ball". It was a damning assessment of the technical gap exposed on home soil.

The second-half switch that put Rakib Hossain and Shuki Itofusa on opposite flanks briefly offered hope, but Shuki's cramps stalled the momentum. Dooley also questioned his players' physical readiness, pointing to Pakistan's extra recovery days and the number of Bangladesh players who cramped up.

Yet fatigue was only part of the problem. Bangladesh lacked a convincing attacking plan, and Dooley's explanation for keeping an exhausted Farhaan on the pitch was hardly reassuring.

"With Farhaan, even if he is tired, we are always looking for him... that he might have that lucky shot," he said.

A team chasing a place in the final needed a way to create chances, not a prayer for individual brilliance.

Dooley's defence of Srabon raised another concern. Protecting a young goalkeeper after a costly mistake was understandable. Suggesting the other two keepers might have made the same error was not.

"Any other goalkeeper would have done maybe the same thing in the same situation," he said. A coach must prepare players for pressure, not make failure under it sound inevitable.

The disorder outside the gates before kick-off and the flares thrown onto the pitch after the goal offered an ugly backdrop. Hamza Choudhury's arrival and the diaspora recruits had fuelled hopes, but star power and crowd enthusiasm cannot conceal structural shortcomings.

Zayyan and Farhaan's tears captured the heartbreak. The harder question is what Bangladesh will learn from it. Until ambition is matched by composure, fitness and tactical conviction, the familiar failure will return.

Batting key to ending Proteas jinx

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's batting will be under the microscope when the visitors face South Africa in the opening Test of the two-match series at Johannesburg's Wanderers Stadium today.

Despite a formidable pace attack that has brought them success at home and abroad -- most recently in Darwin against Australia a few months ago -- the Tigers remain vulnerable with the bat.

Their recent 1-0 home series defeat to West Indies exposed the problem. Bangladesh were bowled out for 272 and 142 in Mirpur, losing the first Test by nine wickets, while Tawhid Hridoy's unbeaten 242 and 82 in Sylhet helped them salvage a draw in the second.

Skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto said in the pre-match presser that Bangladesh were considering an extra batter but had yet to decide between that option and a second spinner, with the pitch likely to dictate the final combination.

He reckons that "three pacers will definitely be in the team" alongside a spinner in Bangladesh's maiden Test at the Wanderers, with Mehidy Hasan Miraz's recent performances in Australia strengthening the case for spin.

Shanto said the entire batting unit needed to deliver, particularly those who "get set at the crease". A big first-innings total, he added, would give Bangladesh's bowlers a chance to compete as the Tigers aim for their first win over the Proteas in the longest format.



- **Bangladesh are set to play a Test at Johannesburg's Wanderers Stadium for the first time.**
- **They have lost all eight Tests in South Africa, five by an innings. Overall, they have lost 14 of their 16 Tests against the Proteas, with the other two ending in rain-affected draws.**
- **The two-match series will form part of the ICC World Test Championship (WTC) cycle. Reigning champions South Africa are second in the standings with 71.43 percentage points, while Bangladesh are fifth with 45.83.**
- **Bangladesh beat Australia and New Zealand on their most recent Test tours, in 2026 and 2022 respectively. However, they are yet to win a Test away to either South Africa or England among the SENA nations.**

South Africa, meanwhile, have named four fast bowlers and a spinner in a pace-heavy eleven. Zubayr Hamza returns to address their troublesome № 3 position, while veteran pacer Dane Paterson also comes in. David Bedingham and Gerald Coetzee make way from the Proteas who beat Australia by 176 runs to clinch their preceding series 2-1.

Skipper Temba Bavuma said Hamza "scored runs in domestic cricket in all the formats" and more aggressive approach had earned him a recall. Paterson, meanwhile, offered greater variety and a different challenge for batters.

"He comes with a little bit more skill with the ball, a different kind of challenge for the batters. It's a case of who we felt was the better bowler for these conditions," Bavuma added.

Moosa hopes not to 'hate VAR' in final

SPORTS REPORTER

India coach Naushad Moosa hopes to benefit from Video Assistant Referee (VAR) decisions in the SAFF Championship final after two calls went against his side in their 2-1 win over Bhutan in the first semifinal at the National Stadium yesterday.

The defending champions led 2-0 at half-time but came under pressure after the break. Bhutan's first goal was initially ruled out for offside before the Indonesian referee overturned the decision. India were then awarded a penalty, only for the referee to reverse that call with the help of VAR. The technology, being used for the first time in the regional tournament, is operated from Thailand.

Asked about the decisions, Moosa laughed before remarking: "Somehow I didn't like it. One goal and one penalty [went against India]... I hate VAR."



Asked about the benefits of VAR for the game, Moosa struck a more positive note. "It's good, it's good... Maybe an advantage for me for the next game, hopefully," said the India coach, a member of the country's 1997 SAFF-winning team.

The victory took the nine-time champions to their 14th final in 15 editions of the tournament and their 10th in succession.

Asked about India's second-half struggles -- they conceded twice against Pakistan after leading 3-0 and also faltered against Maldives -- Moosa said his players had failed to replicate their first-half performance. "Let me take it in a positive way -- I think we defended well in the second half."





ARGENTINA, BRAZIL STUTTER

Uruguay players celebrate their 2-1 win over Argentina in an international friendly at Estadio La Bombonera in Buenos Aires yesterday, as the Albiceleste began the post-Messi era with a defeat. Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni, however, urged patience with the country's emerging talents, pointing to several positives from the game. (Inset) Meanwhile, Brazil's indifferent form continued as they suffered a 3-2 defeat to Japan in a feisty encounter in Singapore, despite a brace from Vinicius Jr. PHOTO: REUTERS

WHAT TO WATCH

T Sports
South Africa vs Bangladesh
1st Test, Day 1
Live from 2:00 pm

Sony Sports 1
New Zealand vs India
5th ODI
Live from 8:00 am

Sony Sports 2
UEFA Nations League
Belarus vs Albania
Live from 11:00 pm

Spain vs England
Live from 1:45 am (Monday)

Sony Sports 5
UEFA Nations League
Belgium vs Italy
Live from 1:45 am (Monday)

