DHAKA TUESDAY NOVEMBER 17, 2026, AGRAHAYAN 2, 1433 BS

SPORT



> Given that the team is currently not competitive, I want to do more. I want to do more because I enjoy being here, so that the team can become more competitive on the global stage.
>
> Brazil coach **CARLO ANCELOTTI**

Pakistan eye historic title against champions India

SPORTS REPORTER

On one side are nine-time champions India, and on the other are first-time finalists Pakistan. On paper, the SAFF Championship final might look like a foregone conclusion, but the two teams' contrasting journeys suggest otherwise.

India (138), the top-ranked team in the tournament, have reached the final with an all-win record, having beaten Pakistan 3-2 in their opening match, before defeating Maldives 1-0 and edging past Bhutan by the same margin in the semifinals. Pakistan, meanwhile, are the lowest ranked at 197, and recovered from their opening defeat to India by beating Maldives 3-0 in their final group match before overcoming hosts Bangladesh 1-0 in the semifinals.

India arrived with a second-string squad and have been further depleted by the departure of six players midway through the tournament. Pakistan, in contrast, received a boost with the arrival of five Europe-based players ahead of the semifinal, strengthening their hopes of a historic title.

Coached by Nolberto Solano, Pakistan have already enjoyed a promising run, having won a four-nation tournament before impressing in the FIFA ASEAN Cup. They will now look to cap their campaign with their first SAFF crown.

Solano, however, insisted that neither side should consider themselves favourites, describing the final as a 50-50 contest.

"We have a lot of respect for India. Both teams have the same chances, 50-50, and it will depend on how well we perform on the pitch," he said, praising his players for their commitment during nearly a month of preparations.

Pakistan captain Abdullah Iqbal described reaching the final as a major milestone for the country's football and said winning the title would make it even more significant.

India coach Noushad Moosa, meanwhile, said his side would adopt a different approach from their opening encounter against Pakistan, taking into account the changes in their opponents' squad.

The final kicks off at 8:00pm at the National Stadium in Dhaka tonight, bringing the curtain down on two weeks of football.

Final ticket prices slashed drastically

Ticket prices for the SAFF Championship final have been reduced following Bangladesh's elimination from the tournament, with gallery tickets now costing Tk 200, club house tickets Tk 500 and VIP tickets Tk 750.

Sajeeb Rashid, CEO of TSA Sports & Entertainment, said the discounted tickets were available online and would also be sold at the stadium gates on matchday.

Sri Lanka coach fined $500

SAFF has fined Sri Lanka head coach Abdullah Al Mutairi USD 500 and issued him a warning for criticising refereeing and accusing the regional body of favouring host nations.

The Kuwaiti coach questioned SAFF's impartiality after his side drew with Bhutan, alleging that the organisation wanted a Bangladesh-India final for commercial reasons. After Sri Lanka's 4-0 defeat to Bangladesh, he also accused SAFF of prejudice against Arab coaches and said he would not return to its competitions. The SAFF Disciplinary Committee decided on the punishment at an online meeting.



PHOTO: **STAR**

WHAT TO WATCH

T SPORTS
Pakistan vs Sri Lanka
2nd Test, Day 1
Live from 10:30 am
South Africa vs Bangladesh
1st Test, Day 3
Live from 2:00 pm
SAFF Championship Final
India vs Pakistan
Live from 8:00 pm

SONY SPORTS 4
UEFA Nations League
Wales vs Portugal
Live from 1:45 am
(Wednesday)

SONY SPORTS 5
UEFA Nations League
Poland vs Sweden
Live from 1:45 am
(Wednesday)



Litton Das's 120 took Bangladesh to a challenging total of 400 in the first innings of the first Test against South Africa at the Wanderers Stadium in Johannesburg yesterday. (Inset) Later, Hasan Mahmud took three wickets as the hosts were restricted to 287 for four at stumps on the second day. PHOTO: **AFP**

In stillness, Litton finds time

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Time is perhaps the most valuable aspect of batting, and Litton Das appeared to have ample amounts of it in his hands on the opening day of the first Test between South Africa and Bangladesh in Johannesburg on Sunday. In his stillness, he finds time.

Litton produced another special knock when the team were in dire need of one at the Wanderers Stadium. The importance of the runs, coupled with the consummate ease with which he scored them, put pressure back on one of the best bowling units in the world.

Albeit coming on against the old ball, Litton's role in red-ball cricket aligns with his batting template. He takes the game forward, taking advantage of the softer ball operating in the 60 to 80 over. While Tawhid Hridoy and Tanzid Tamim did the early hard work against the new ball, Litton's job was to ensure that hard work paid off.

He immediately put pressure on the South African attack, which appeared to play to his tune. That tempo he set offset the two quick wickets Kagiso Rabada had produced in back-to-back deliveries of Day 1's second session. A fluent but controlled pull shot off Rabada showed he was in his elements, for short deliveries are bread and butter for the Bangladesh wicketkeeper-batter. Short-arm jabs and well-controlled pulls were the facets of his early innings.

Both he and Hridoy are wristy customers, but how differently they applied themselves showed how Litton can arrest an opposition's momentum. In particular, Litton appeared to take Proteas' lone spinner Simon Harmer out of the attack, using his feet to dictate proceedings.

Hridoy added a trigger movement to pace, similar to Australia's Steve Smith in particular, shuffling across to counter movement. It was designed to take off-side dismissals out. Rabada explained it perfectly at the press conference.

"It just looked like they were just getting into our channel, and the wicket wasn't as quick off the fuller length, uh, as it normally is," Rabada said, hinting that the off-stump line was appearing to be one where both Hridoy and Litton could work the ball off their bodies.

Hridoy certainly enjoyed scoring from flicks. Litton could just pull Rabada from an off-stump line. While Hridoy's shuffles were noticeable, Litton's impeccable wristwork allowed him to add that little uncertainty in bowlers' minds, where they had to adjust to a wider line outside off. Then he went for drives. On a quicker wicket, it could spell trouble, but Rabada felt the batters already knew the pace of the wicket allowed both of the batters' approach.

"I think they just got into the channel, played at a few balls where if the wicket was a bit quicker, they would be getting themselves into a bit of trouble," Rabada said.

"I think that they identified that and they left well when we bowled wider, but got into the channel and almost forced us to go a bit straighter and kind of scoring on both sides of the wicket."

Litton also left well, producing a signature knock reminiscent of the one he played in Christchurch in 2022. Over the last five years, he has been among the top eight batters to score centuries in away Tests. The Wanderers hundred was his fourth, but despite his fluency, there was disappointment when he fell to Dane Paterson yesterday, a tame dismissal off a short delivery.

That regret was heightened by the sense that Litton was good for more, as Bangladesh's innings ended on 400 before South Africa piled on the runs.

- Bangladesh's 400 was well above the Wanderers Stadium's average first-innings score of 314. England were the last visiting side to win a Test in Johannesburg, in 2020, after scoring 400 batting first.
- Bangladesh's total was their highest against South Africa, surpassing their 326 in Chattogram in 2015, and their highest in South Africa (320 in Potchefstroom. 2017).
- Bangladesh became the first subcontinental side to score 400 in the first innings of a Test series in South Africa.
- No team have lost at the Wanderers after scoring 400 or more in the first innings.
- Litton Das's 120 was his eighth Test century and first against South Africa, making him the third Bangladeshi to score a Test hundred against the Proteas after Mahmudul Hasan Joy and Tawhid Hridoy. All three centuries came in South Africa.
- Litton has scored Test hundreds in five countries: Bangladesh (four), Pakistan, New Zealand, the UAE and South Africa (one each).



England's Jude Bellingham (L), Anthony Gordon (C) and Harry Kane celebrate after beating Spain 3-2 in their UEFA Nations League clash in Madrid on Sunday. The victory ended the world champions' 43-match unbeaten run in competitive football. Kane, Ezri Konsa and Ben White scored for England while Mikel Oyarzabal and Nico Williams scored for Spain. The win secured England top spot. PHOTO:**AFP**

IN BRIEF

Lukaku retires from int'l football

REUTERS

Romelu Lukaku, Belgium's all-time leading scorer, announced his retirement from international soccer on Monday after a 16-year career in which he scored 94 goals in 135 games.

The 33-year-old striker, the fifth-highest scorer in men's international football history, helped Belgium finish third at the 2018 World Cup.

"These 16 years I gave all I had for the national team. I went through every emotion possible," Lukaku said on Instagram.

"I played with amazing teammates that I will always be grateful for. I want to thank them all. I want to thank all the coaches as well for pushing and trusting me to help the team. It was a nice ride and I enjoyed every single moment.

Lukaku played in four World Cups and three European Championships.

"I will never forget those moments," he said. "I'm at peace with my decision to stop here. It was amazing, I'm grateful - thank you."

Tigresses' fate hangs in the balance

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh suffered their second defeat in the ICC Women's Emerging Nations Trophy 2026, losing to the Netherlands by five wickets in their third Group B match in Ajman on Monday.

Batting first, Bangladesh managed 129 for eight, with opener Dilara Akter top-scoring with 51 off 46 balls, her second consecutive half-century. Nigar Sultana Joty made 20, while Shorna and Sharmin Akhter scored 19 each. Heather Siegers took four wickets for 21 runs.

The Netherlands reached 131 for five in 19.4 overs, thanks to Sterre Kalis's unbeaten 68 off 50 balls.

Bangladesh, fourth in the five-team group with one win from three matches, must beat Thailand on Wednesday and rely on other results to reach the Super Six, with the top three advancing.