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## Afghanistan lash Pakistan in historic soccer duel

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Afghanistan on Tuesday trounced neighboring Pakistan 3-0 in a friendly match, the first international soccer event to be hosted by Kabul in a decade, reviving memories of a 1977 clash between the two squads at the same venue.

In the first half, Sanjar Ahmadi scored the leader in the maiden FIFA-sanctioned outing against Pakistan in 36 years and whipped a capacity crowd into frenzy at the Afghanistan Football Federation Stadium, which Taliban often used for public floggings.

Amid thunderous rounds of applause, the home side netted two more goals in the second part of what looked an utterly one-sided battle and thus took an unassailable lead. Arash and Maroof Mohammadi dashed the visitors' hopes.

For the hosts, the historic moment came two days ahead of the Afghan Premier League's (RAPL) 2013 tournament. The return match in Pakistan is currently scheduled for December 2013 in Lahore.

Simulcast on national hookup, the rare friendship match drew a throng, including cabinet members, lawmakers, soccer fans, women, security personnel, taxi drivers, students and government officials. The onlookers cheered all good moves by both sides.

Thirty-six years ago, Afghanistan had downed Pakistan, soccer minnows, 2-0 at the same stadium. With an unimpressive track record on the global soccer landscape, Pakistan are placed 167th in FIFA rankings.

Although the match was a friendly one, it could help promote people-to-people contact and defuse diplomatic tensions, hoped Afghan coach Humayun Kargar.

“We want to forge better ties between Kabul and Islamabad through sports and bring the Afghans closer to their neighbours and the world at large,” he told reporters in Kabul on Monday.

“I am hopeful the match will send a message of goodwill to the people of Pakistan and Afghanistan and their governments,” Kargar remarked, saying the result was not as important as the spirit of the game.

Ranked 139th in the world, Afghanistan were defeated 2-0 by Turkmenistan in the last international match in Kabul in 2003. Away from home, the national side thrashed Sri Lanka and Mongolia this year.

Four referees from Tajikistan supervised the event, according to Sayed Aghazada, the AFF secretary-general, who said hosting the first international game in 10 years represented a major highlight for football in Afghanistan.

Pakistan coach Zavis Milosavljevic said both teams were comprised of young players who had made elaborate preparations for the game.