

## 'Will give myself 7.5 out of 10'

Kazi Salahuddin, the long-serving president of Bangladesh Football Federation, is all set to run for a fourth term in the upcoming election on October 3. The football icon has his detractors, but also the charisma and support which has pulled him through on last three occasions. With the election coming up, The Daily Star's Anisur Rahman spoke in detail with Salahuddin about his achievements as the BFF boss over the past 12 years, the obstacles that he has faced during this journey and his plans for the next term, if elected.



The Daily Star (DS): You are contesting for the president's post of Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) for a fourth successive term. What has prompted you to run again?

Kazi Salahuddin (KS): When I became BFF president for the first time in 2008, you journalists had asked me why I had come as there was no league and no competition. I had said that I had come from an obligation towards football. But I found there was no structure of football. Since then I have completed 12 leagues in 12 years and all the footballers of the national team are my product. So, a foundation has been set. With this foundation, now is the time to build a 30-storey building. That's why I want to continue (as president) and complete that building.

TDS: If elected again, what will be your projects?  
KS: People have lots of dreams, but there is difference between dream and reality. We will try our best so that we can reach a certain stage. It's unfortunate that it will take at least 12 to 18 months to recover from the seven-to-eight month gap due to the coronavirus pandemic. It is another challenge.

TDS: How do you evaluate your work of the last 12 years?

KS: There has been continuation of some competitions like Bangladesh Premier League, Federation Cup and Independence Cup. Many people say many things but the fact is no one gave any money to districts for the district league, but I gave them money every year. They might have more demand but I have to have the money in my box. No one supports me, neither government nor FIFA. AFC provides

us fund for their purpose. I have to manage money personally for districts. I don't give them (bribe). I give them money officially. League is being held in 40 to 50 districts even though there may be lack of quality. Districts also have responsibility (to bring quality). If you want to expand the love for football, the government, people, media and players have to come forward. If I make mistakes, tell me. I will make amends. Apart from money, the biggest thing I gave to the federation is time which has a lot of value.

TDS: After being elected for the

second is the national team. Our responsibility is to provide quality coach, trainer, physiotherapist, goalkeeping coach which I didn't get during my playing career. I sent the national team for training in Qatar, Malaysia. Academy is a very difficult subject. We have already set up an academy which produced has a result (trophy) in UEFA Assist Tournament in Bangladesh. The problem is that I spent 2.16 lakh dollars for coaches and Tk 1.25 crore for players in one year and I had to collect this fund alone. An academy needs money to be run.

I'm also thinking of how to manage money and hold the first, second and third division leagues.

TDS: BFF spent record amount of money per year, between 35 and 40 crore taka, and one-third of it in administration while there is no reflection of football development.

KS: FIFA won't give us money to hold leagues with a few exceptions. 80 percent money from FIFA and AFC is spent for administration including for the coaches and that's the law of FIFA and AFC.

TDS: There is allegation that you could not emphasise on men's football at age-level compared to women's football at age level.

KS: It is not correct. Whenever I wanted to hold U-18 (boys) tournaments, the clubs did not support me. Big teams refused to play. Some 70 teams are playing in Pioneer League, which covers youth level. Of course, men's football is my first priority, but both men's and women's football are my priority.

TDS: As per the condition of professional league, clubs must have youth teams but they don't have in reality. Why the federation could bring those clubs into the professionalism?

KS: 'Could not bring' is not the correct word. I don't have power to force them to do it even though I'm telling them time and again. If you don't do your work, your employer will terminate you. But I don't have the authority to terminate anyone (the clubs). I can only request them to come into professionalism.

TDS: Out of 10, how many marks will you give yourself and your committee?

KS: I will give 7.5 because I have been successful in holding leagues and tournaments, in finding success in women's football, etc. If I get official funding, I will obtain 10 out of 10.



third term in 2016 you set priority on three things - district football, strong national team and an academy. How much improvement have you made in these three areas?

KS: Whatever the reasons, I saw districts were very weak. That's why I brought money from the government last year and distributed to the districts. If the districts show a bit of interest in holding league and manage some money, then we won't have any problem.

The bottom line is I need Tk 5 to 6 crore per year to run an academy which I can't manage.

TDS: Football at lower divisions and districts have been ignored due to focus only on top-flight. What will you say to this allegation?

KS: Yes and no. The biggest problem is funding. You have to set the priority first. If you give me a bucketful of money, I can implement all the programmes easily. I'm contesting the polls, but



Edin Dzeko opened the scoring against Italy in their Nations League encounter at the Stadio Artemio Franchi in Florence on Friday night. Although his goal was cancelled out in a 1-1 draw, the striker said Bosnia-Herzegovina 'got some pride back after the two defeats' to Italy last year.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

## Bosnia halt Italy's winning run at 11

AGENCIES



Bosnia ended Italy's run of 11 successive wins when they held Roberto Mancini's side to a 1-1 draw in their Nations League match on Friday while the Netherlands began the post-Ronald Koeman era by keeping up their former coach's approach to the game and beating Poland 1-0 in their Nations League opener.

"The winning streak had to end sooner or later. We're glad it was with a draw and not a defeat. We'll keep this basic structure going forward, a few players will change because obviously they can't play every three days," Italy coach Roberto Mancini said after a game that saw both teams strike the woodwork in the first half. The Azzurri were playing their first match since beating Armenia 9-1 last November, a gap of 291 days -- Italy's longest since 1945-46.

"I always love scoring goals, not just today," Bosnia goalscorer Edin Dzeko told RAI Sport. "I was right yesterday when I said neither team were 100 per cent fit. We could see the lack of sharpness, but it was a balanced game. I think both sides had chances."

Meanwhile, the Netherlands had all



STEVEN BERGWIJN

the hallmarks of confident showings of the last two years under Koeman, who sparked a revival after they missed out on the 2016 Euros and the 2018 World Cup.

After Koeman quit to take up his "dream job" with Barcelona last month, his assistant Dwight Lodeweges took over as interim coach and the Dutch team hardly missed a beat. Steven Bergwijn scored his first international goal, finishing from close range after Hans Hateboer volleyed a pass from Frenkie de Jong back across the face of the goal in the 61st minute.

"Ronald Koeman congratulated me by text. He thought we had a really good second half. So, thank you Ronald," Lodeweges told Dutch television after the game.

## 'It was a brutal drama'

Lionel Messi will stay at Barcelona. After a whirlwind week of what is surely among the foremost transfer sagas of all time, the Argentine broke his silence and said that he would remain at the club. However, he does so with a heavy heart, with accusations of the president 'not keeping his word'. In a wide-ranging interview with Goal, he discussed what had led to him making the decision to leave the club, how he was denied what he thought was his "right" and the impact it would have going forward. The excerpts are below:

### REACTIONS AS MESSI REVERSES HIS DECISION

No smile, no handshake and no reconciliation. Lionel Messi is staying at Barcelona but this was no happy ending. It is over, for now, yet there is no real closure and no one truly got what they wanted, maybe not even Josep Maria Bartomeu. A survivor clinging to power, he will no longer preside over the departure of the best player in the club's history but nor will he evade responsibility for it. His victory, if that is what this was, is hollow one. Messi made sure of that.

--- Sid Lowe, The Guardian's La Liga correspondent.

There is only one thing worse than Messi leaving, and that is Messi staying under these conditions. After the first draw all the seams of a forced agreement will burst.

--- Jorge Valdano, former Argentina international and ex-Real Madrid player.

Lionel Messi changes direction more gracefully than any footballer who ever lived but it was a clunking U-turn that led him to stay at Barcelona, at least for one more season.

--- Matt Dickinson, The Times.

If he can stay for one more year and we can make the most of him and go see him play at the stadium, for me it's very positive.

--- 31-year-old Barcelona fan Oriol Wives.

I think it's good he isn't leaving but with all the mess he has created, to be honest, it is not good for Barcelona because he doesn't give the impression he wants to play for the team.

--- 24-year-old Barca fan Sergi Roca.

Messi cannot be captain now!

--- Tweeted the Spanish TV channel El Chiringuito



### WHY IT TOOK SO LONG TO BREAK HIS SILENCE:

First, because the defeat in Lisbon [8-2 loss in the Champions League to Bayern Munich] was very hard. We knew they were a very difficult opponent, but we didn't know that we were going to end that way, giving such a poor image for Barcelona. We gave a very bad image. It was wrong, I did not feel like anything. I wanted time to pass and then go out to clarify everything.

### WHY HE WANTED TO LEAVE BARCELONA:

It was not because of the Bayern result, it comes from many things. I always said I wanted to end here. I wanted a winning project and to win titles with the club and continue expanding the legend of Barcelona. The truth is that there has been no project or anything for a long time, they juggle and cover holes as things go by.

It has hurt me a lot that things were published against me and above all, that false things are published. That they thought I could go to trial against Barca in order to benefit. I would never do such a thing. I repeat, I wanted to go and it was my right, because the contract said that I could be released. And it's not 'I'm leaving and that's it'. I was leaving and it cost me a lot. I wanted to go because I was thinking of living my last years of football happily.

I looked further and I want to compete at the highest level, win titles, compete in the Champions League. You can win or lose it, because it is very difficult, but you have to compete. At least compete and let things like Rome [3-0 loss at home that saw them exit the Champions League in the quarterfinal in 2017/18 due to an aggregate tie of 4-4], Liverpool [4-0 loss at Anfield in the Champions League semifinal in 2018/19 that undid all their hard work for a 3-0 win in the reverse leg] not happen to us... things like Lisbon.

### THE BUILD-UP TO THE BUROFAX:

I told the club, especially the president [Josep Maria Bartomeu], that I wanted to go. I've been telling him all year. He believed it was time to step aside. I believed that the club needed more young people and I thought my time in Barcelona was over, feeling very sorry



because I always said that I wanted to finish my career here.

It was a very difficult year, I suffered a lot in training, in games and in the dressing room. Everything became very difficult for me and there came a time when I considered looking for new goals, new places. It was not because of the Champions League result against Bayern. I had been pondering the decision for a long time. I told the president and the president always said that at the end of the season I could decide if I wanted to go or if I wanted to stay and in the end he did not end up keeping his word.

The burofax was to make it official in some way. Throughout the year I had been telling the president that I wanted to go, that the time had come to seek new directions in my career. He told me all the time: 'We'll talk, no, this and that', but nothing. Sending the burofax was making it official that I wanted to go and that I was free and I was not going to use the optional year. It was not to make a mess, or to go against the club.

### HIS LOVE FOR BARCELONA AND HOW IT FELT WHEN IT WAS DOUBTED:

I did feel hurt by things that I heard from people questioning my love for Barcelona and saying things that I think I didn't deserve. It also helped me to see who is who. This world of football that is very difficult and there are many

very false people. This has happened has helped me to recognize many false people. It hurt me when my love for this club was questioned. No matter how much I go or stay, my love for Barca will never change.

I love Barcelona and I'm not going to be better than here anywhere else. Still I have the right to decide. I was going to look for new goals and new challenges. And tomorrow I could have come back, because here in Barcelona I have everything. My son, my family, grew up here and are from here. There is nothing wrong with leaving. I needed it, the club needed it and it was good for everyone.

### HIS REPLY TO PEOPLE SAYING HE ONLY WANTED MORE MONEY:

I always put the club before anything else. I had the possibility of leaving Barça many times. The money? Every year I was able to leave and earn more money than at Barcelona. I always said that this was my home and it was what I felt and feel. Better than here it is difficult. I felt that I needed a change and new goals, new things.

### HOW HIS FAMILY REACTED

When I communicated this to my wife and children, it was a brutal drama. The whole family crying, my children did not want to leave Barcelona, nor did they want to change schools.

All this time it has been hard for everyone. He [his father Jorge] was clear

about what he wanted and said. My wife with all the pain of her soul supported and accompanied me.

Mateo is still young and he doesn't realize what it means to go somewhere else and make your life for a few years elsewhere. Thiago yes, he is bigger. He heard something on TV and found out something and asked. I didn't want to know anything about being able to leave, having to live in a new school or make new friends. He cried to me and said "let's not go", I repeat that it was hard, really. It was understandable. It happened to me. It is very difficult to make a decision.

### ON THE JUNE 10 DEADLINE

We go back to the beginning. I thought and we were sure that I was free. The president always said that at the end of the season I could decide if I stayed or not. Now, they cling to the fact that I did not say it before June 10 even though on June 10 June we were competing for the league in the middle of this coronavirus pandemic which altered all the dates.

What they say is that I did not send it before June 10, but I repeat, we were in the middle of all the competitions and it was not the moment. But apart from that, the president always told me 'when the season is over, you decide if you stay or leave', he never set a date.

### WHY HE HAS DECIDED TO CONTINUE AND WHAT THAT MEANS:

I am going to continue at the club because the president told me that the only way to leave was to pay the 700 million clause; that is impossible. And then another was to go to trial. I would never go to court against Barca because it is the club that I love, that gave me everything since I arrived, it is the club of my life, I have made my life here.

I am going to continue at Barça and my attitude is not going to change no matter how much I have wanted to go. I will do my best. I always want to win, I'm competitive and I don't like to lose anything. I always want the best for the club, for the dressing room and for myself. I said at the time that it was not allowing us to win the Champions League. Actually, now I don't know what will happen. There is a new coach and

### THE BOMBSHELL IN BARCELONA

**August 14:** Messi and Barcelona are humiliated in the Champions League, crashing out after an 8-2 thrashing by eventual winners Bayern Munich

**August 17:** Setien sacked; Messi on vacation

**August 19:** Former Barca midfielder Ronald Koeman takes over from Setien, with reports claiming he told Messi he would no longer have the "privileges" he had become accustomed to.

**August 25:** Burofax arrives at Barca offices.

**August 26:** All roads lead to Manchester City

**August 27:** Bartomeu seeks to put responsibility on Messi

**August 29:** Neither training nor PCR.

**August 30:** La Liga supports Barcelona.

**September 2:** Jorge Messi arrives in Barcelona and meets with Josep Maria Bartomeu.

**September 4:** Jorge issues statement against La Liga before Messi says he will stay.

a new idea. That's good, but then we have to see how the team responds and whether or not it will give us to compete. What I can say is that I'm staying and I'm going to give my best.