



Nearly nightmare revisited

PASADENA, Calif., July 14: Brazilians have a maxim for team that dominates a game but fails to score. It goes: "Whoever doesn't make it, takes it."

It means a team will probably allow a goal if it doesn't score when it should. It's almost a sense of divine justice — or injustice, depending on your point of view.

For a while, it looked like Brazil was going to trot out that saying against Sweden on Wednesday, reports AP.

The Brazilians dominated their World Cup semifinal match from start to finish. They stifled Sweden's vaunted air game and outshot them 26-3.

Yet through 80 minutes, they sweated through a 0-0 tie. The ball whizzed by the post and was tapped out from the line, but it did not, would not go in.

They were saved by Romario with 10 minutes left to play. Jorginho's cross from the

right side found the striker unmarked in the penalty area, and he headed the ball home for the game's only goal.

"Technically, tactically and physically, we controlled the whole game," Brazilian coach Carlos Alberto Parreira said. "We took the initiative from the beginning, and 1-0 doesn't translate Brazil's supremacy. The only difficulty was putting the ball in the goal."

Yes, but isn't putting the ball in the goal the object of the game?

It could have been a lot easier if Brazil, who face Italy in the final Sunday at the Rose Bowl, had capitalized on any of the many chances they blew.

Sinho was first. In the 13th minute, he took a feed from Bebeto and raced in on goal alone, but his shot missed wide to the left.

Twenty-five minutes into the game, Romario made a solo run, dribbled past Swedish goalie Tomas Ravelli and lazily tapped the ball toward the net. But fullback Patrik Andersson streaked in to knock it away.

Romario kept it from happening again. "I'm here to make goals and to miss them," he said.

Dismayed, but not daunted

SOFIA, Bulgaria, July 14: Bulgaria took their defeat to Italy in their World Cup semifinal with aplomb, proud that their little-heralded team had advanced so far, reports AP.

Hopeful their "miracle team" would continue its winning ways after upsetting defending titlist Germany, thousands of Bulgarians gathered in Sofia late Wednesday to watch the match against Italy on a huge screen in front of the Palace of Culture.

Roberto Baggio scored two goals to propel Italy into the finals, against favoured Brazil. But faithful fans celebrated with fireworks the Bulgarian team's only goal Wednesday — a penalty kick late in the first half by Hristo Stoichkov.

Despite the Bulgarians' inability to knot the score, fans were dismayed but not daunted.

"Bulgarians, tonight you can cry, but there's no reason to be ashamed. We thank you that you made a whole people happy," was the first TV comment after the game ended.

"Although I feel sad, I'm proud to be a Bulgarian, because our team has shown it's among the best in the world," said a 44-year-old fan, Kamen Tihov.

The Bulgarian team has taken part in six world cups and only once proceeded to the second round, in 1986 in Mexico. They had never won a match before they thrashed

Stoichkov bitter

NEW YORK, July 14: Bulgaria striker Hristo Stoichkov hit out at French referee Joel Quiniou after their 2-1 World Cup semifinal defeat to Italy here on Wednesday, reports AFP.

The Barcelona striker claimed Quiniou cost them the game.

"God was on our side, but the referee was French," Stoichkov said. "Today's match proved the officiating in this tournament has been the worst in history of the World Cup."

Quiniou turned down penalty appeals from Emil Kostadinov and Yordan Letchkov as Bulgaria attempted to pull level.

In Sofia, Bulgarian newspapers had said before the match that they had no chance of winning because the referee was French.

Bulgaria qualified for the finals by beating France in April last year. France's defeat put them out of the finals.

"France will not forget for a long time the humiliation of being eliminated last November 17 in Paris," wrote the Daily Sport.

"Quiniou is a man and could, without wanting to, be tempted to take revenge," it added.

The devastated Stoichkov went even further, hinting that FIFA wanted to ensure Bulgaria did not reach the final.

"You have a referee on the verge of retirement," Stoichkov said. "It's not just coincidence he was chosen to officiate this match."

Stoichkov added that he may not play in Saturday's third play-off between Bulgaria and Sweden.

He has been plagued by a strained muscle throughout the tournament. "It is not serious but I do not want to aggravate it," he said.

right side found the striker unmarked in the penalty area, and he headed the ball home for the game's only goal.

"I'm still trying to figure out where that guy came from," Romario said.

Seven minutes later, Bebeto served Romario on a breakaway, but he stepped on the ball and couldn't get off a decent shot.

Uncomfortable memories began to stir of past World Cup setbacks.

One was in 1986 in Mexico when Brazil dominated their quarterfinal match with France, but Careca clanked shots off the post and Zico missed a penalty shot.

The game went into overtime, and then into a penalty-kick tiebreaker. Socrates and Julio Cesar came up short, and Brazil were out.

Four years later in Italy, Brazil again "deserved" to win in a second-round game with Argentina. But in their only serious chance, Diego Maradona and Claudio Caniggia teamed up to give Argentina a 1-0 victory.

Romario kept it from happening again.

"I'm here to make goals and to miss them," he said.

Greece 4-0 and proceeded to defeat two-time champions Argentina 2-0, Mexico 1-0 on penalty kicks, and defending titlist Germany 2-1.

Then the bubble burst, and Italy prevailed 2-1 over Bulgaria at Giants' Stadium. Bulgaria play Sweden in the consolation match for third place Saturday in Pasadena, Calif.

Commentators were kind the day after the loss.

"The game gave us several huge celebrations, sent many and mighty opponents home. Did anyone ever hope to see Bulgaria among the four leading soccer teams in the world? This championship changed the attitude toward our country, and it changed us, too," read a commentary Thursday in the Daily Standard.

"Great team in a great match — that's what the Bulgarians were. They lost to three-time champions Italy 1-2, but fought bravely and were the Italians' equals throughout the match.

"And though the series of their wins in the past two weeks raised the expectations of millions of Bulgarians to unprecedented heights, hardly

anyone was bitter about the 1-2," the Daily Express commented.

Immediately after the match, state TV aired interviews with members of the squad and with coach Dimitar Penev.

The Italians played very well. They deserved to win. They are experienced and knew how to get what they wanted. We tried to tip the beam in the second half, but we hardly got any chance," the coach said.

The players complained they did not get a penalty for Italian defender Alessandro Costacurta's handplay.

Bulgarian midfielder Krassimir Balakov echoed the opinion of teammates as to the reason French referee Joel Quiniou didn't give the other penalties.

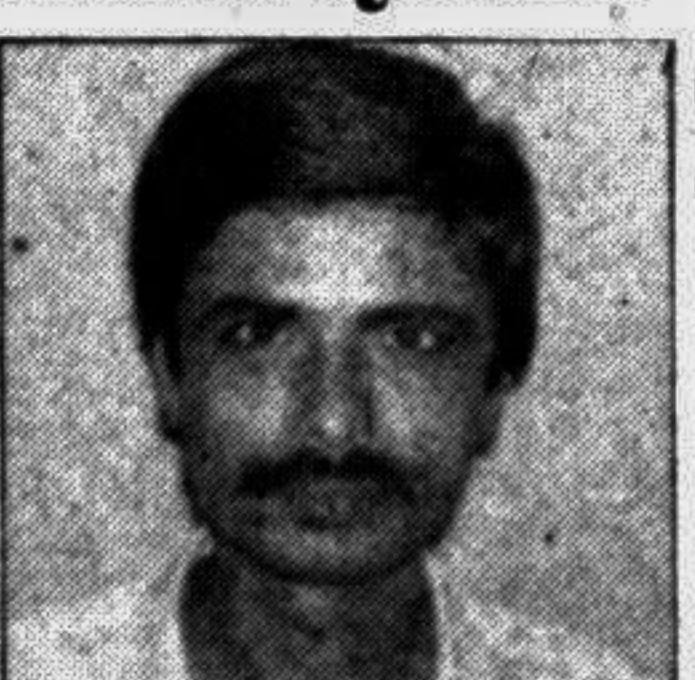
The referee was French and he probably cannot forget that we eliminated the French team," said the midfielder, referring to Bulgaria's goal 10 seconds before time in the last qualifying match against France.

The team players and coaches were declared honorary citizens of Sofia.

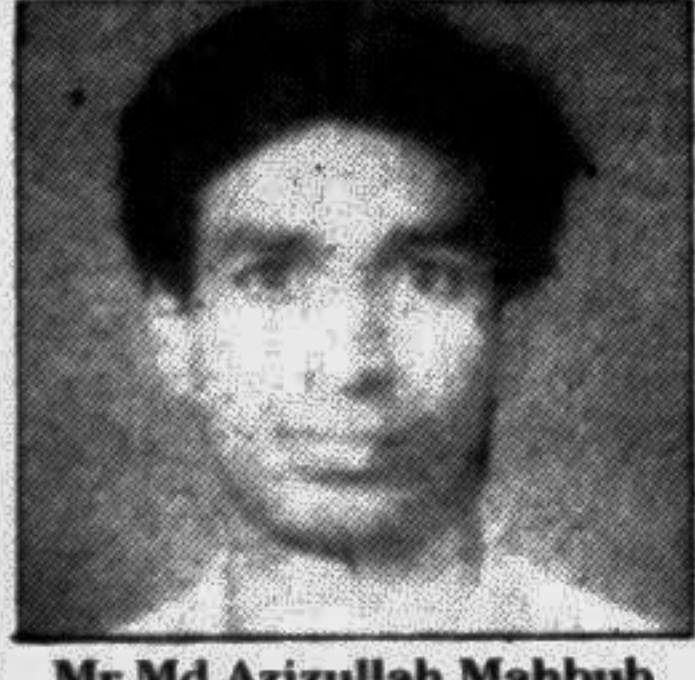
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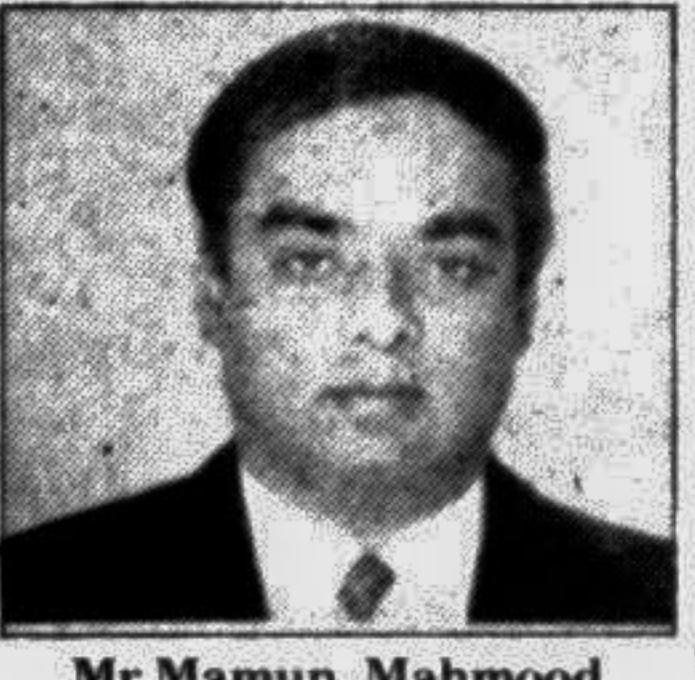
Mrs Naz Mustafa
First Prize Winner



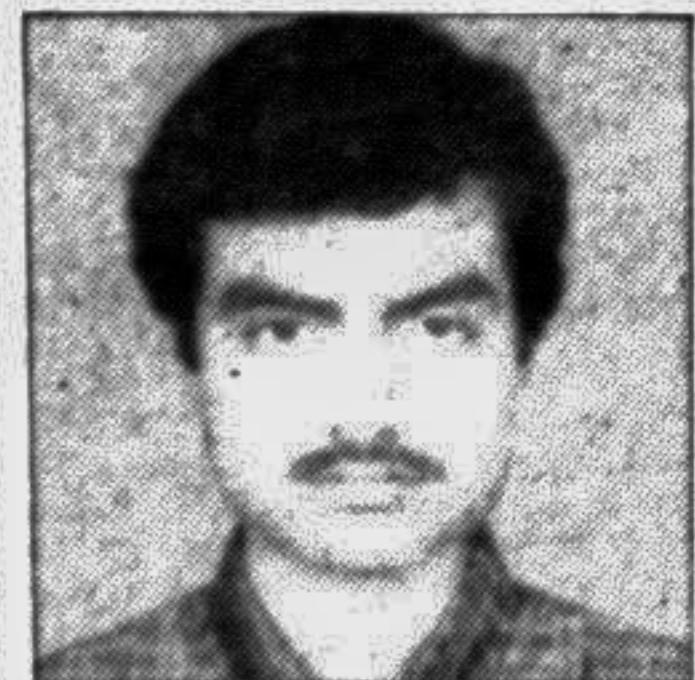
Mr Md Masroor-e-Sattar Ujjal
Fourth Prize Winner



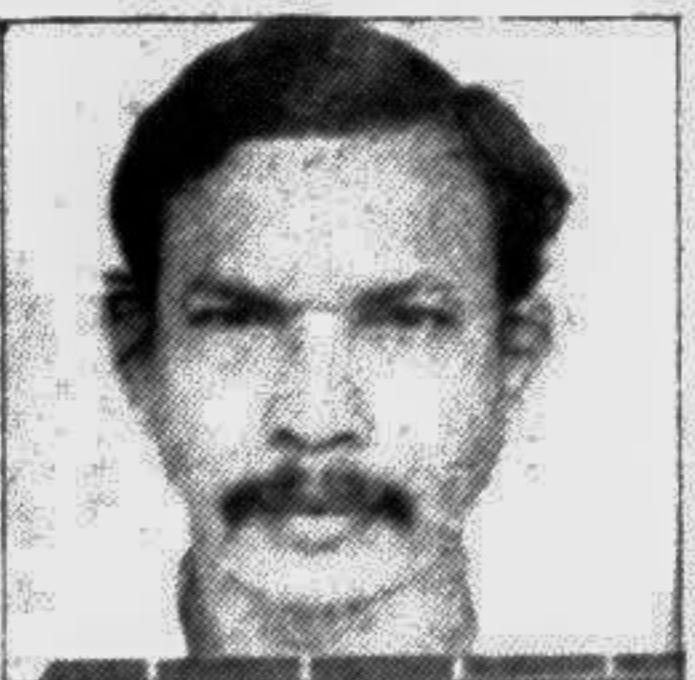
Mr Md Azizullah Mahbub
Second Prize Winner



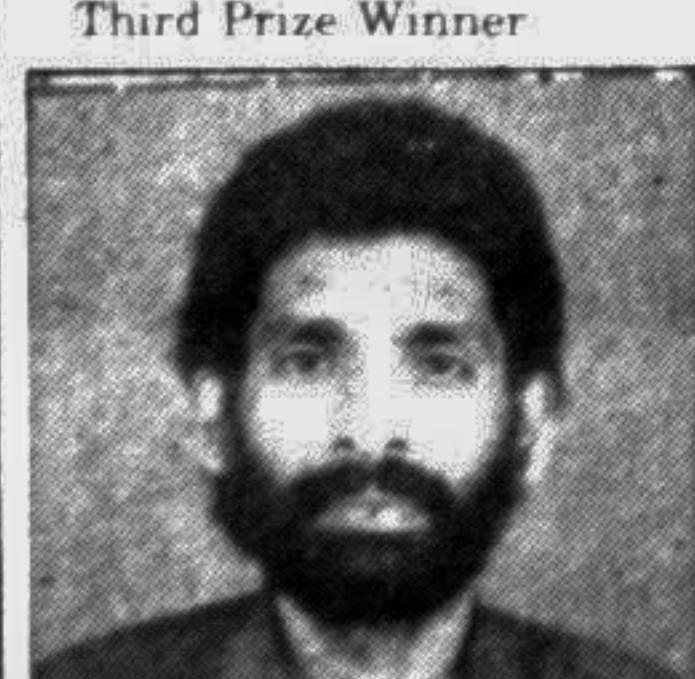
Mr Mamun Mahmood
Fourth Prize Winner



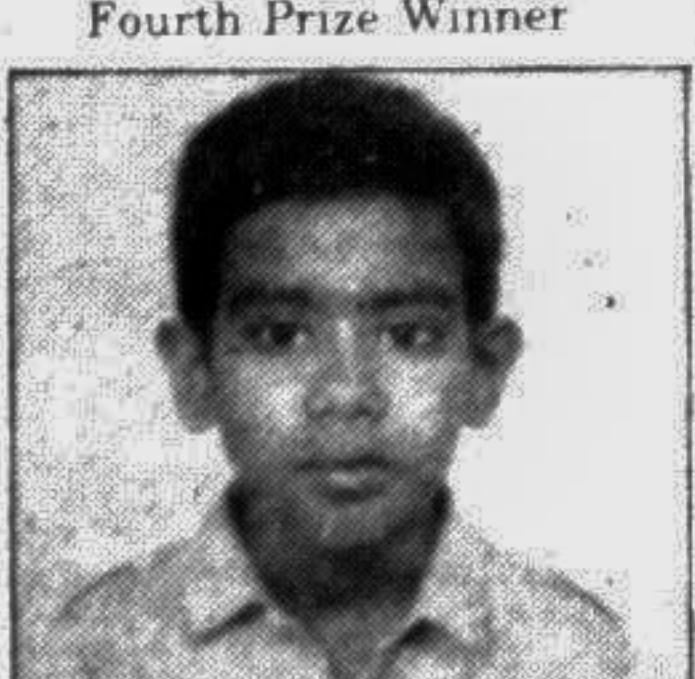
Mr Md Khaled Saifullah
Third Prize Winner



Mr Mojahid
Fourth Prize Winner



Mr Munawwar Bin Abdul Aziz
Fourth Prize Winner



Shabu Huda
Fourth Prize Winner



Players of the Brazilian World Cup team pose for photographers before their semifinal match against Sweden at the Pasadena Rose Bowl in Los Angeles on July 13. Brazil won 1-0.

— AFP photo

Ravelli, reveller in ruins



Ravelli, reveller in ruins

PASADENA, July 14: Thomas Ravelli was the star for Sweden so many times that when the fatal

goal finally skidded past him he still seemed more hero than goat.

In the quarterfinals against Romania, Ravelli's two key saves in the penalty-kick shootout gave Sweden the victory. When Romario's 80th minute header bounced past him Wednesday to give Brazil a 1-0 victory, there were few blaming Ravelli, reports AP.

"They had a lot of good opportunities (to score) and we felt that the first team to score would win the match," Swedish coach Tommy Svensson said. "I thought Ravelli was excellent as was (Tomas) Brodin."

Ravelli, playing in a record 116th game for Sweden, kept the Scandinavians in the game for 79 minutes, despite Brazil outshooting the Europeans nearly 9-1. He dove he leaped, he scrambled.

But when Jorginho served in a long cross from outside the right of the penalty area, Romario went up unchallenged and put a header from the edge of the goalbox just inside the left post.

"I couldn't leave my line when Jorginho hit the cross," Ravelli recalled. "I stood on my line. Romario came between two defenders I think and was first at the ball. He made a very good header. It was impossible for me to save it."

Ravelli, 34, is only nine games short of the now retired English goalkeeper Peter Shilton's world mark of 125 national team appearances. But he said breaking the team record that stood since 1978

wasn't that important.

"I didn't think about that at all today," he said. "I said before that this game was so important that you just don't think about the record. You only think about the game you're going to play."

Like the other Swedes, Ravelli felt the Swedes had a chance to beat Brazil going into the game.

"But I felt more and more during the game that they were better than us," he said.



THOMAS RAVELLI
"We were very tired in the second half. They had so many good scoring chances. They could have capitalised on many of them."

Ravelli gave up an early second-half goal to Romario in the two teams' first-round encounter, which earned the Brazilians a 1-1 draw.

"But they were more concentrated this time," Ravelli said. "Last time they had already qualified (for the second round)."

Ravelli said the Swedes, who never have beaten Brazil

in seven World Cup games (0-2-5) dating back to their first meeting in 1938, said the Swedes were very sad returning to the dressing room.

"It will take two, three hours before you can think back (on the game)," Ravelli said. "But I enjoyed the game. I enjoyed all games in the tournament. I think I played OK today."

Ravelli made two saves in a penalty shootout against Romania in Sunday's quarterfinal that gave Sweden a 5-4 victory on penalties and made Ravelli a national hero.

The Swedes will return to the Rose Bowl Saturday to play the third-place game against Bulgaria, which lost the other semifinal to Italy 2-1 earlier

Wednesday.

But Ravelli, whose team lost 3-2 to Germany in the 1992 Europeans in Sweden, is looking forward to Saturday's game against Bulgaria despite a long, gruelling World Cup tournament.

Undaunted, Romanians hailed the players as national heroes. It looked like a re-run of the 1989 revolution as workers waved national red, yellow and blue flags, with holes torn at the centre where the communist emblem used to be.

Hagi's team managed to do in 40 days what the government has failed to achieve in almost five years since shaking off Stalinist dictatorship — put a smile on the nation's face and made them feel proud.

"These boys did their best for you," Romanian soccer chief Mircea Sandu told the crowd over a microphone. The players wept.

"We're sorry we didn't give you all that you wanted," said star player Ilie Dumitrescu.

Tens of thousands of Romanians lined avenues into the city centre to greet the players, shouting "We love you, we love you." The team were pelted with flowers as they rode in a 200 vehicle convoy of buses, trucks, jeeps and cars.

Exuberant

BANGKOK, July 14: A Thai football fan in hospital with two broken arms got a bit carried away when Italy scored a goal in a recent World Cup match. He broke into wild applause — and re-broke his arms, reports Reuter.

The fan, who had been injured in a car accident, had completed his treatment and was about to be discharged when he watched Italy beat Spain in their quarter-final match last Saturday, his doctor told the Bangkok Post in a report published on Thursday.

"The match was so exciting and when Roberto Baggio scored the last goal the man forgot himself and clapped his hands together very hard," the doctor said.

The result is he has to stay on in hospital for another two weeks while his arms heal all over again."

The doctor did not say if he would let his patient watch Italy play Brazil in Sunday's final.

Romanians receive heroes' welcome

BUCHAREST, July 14: Romania's national soccer team were feted as heroes, with flowers and flags, kisses and champagne, in a tumultuous carnival welcome on Thursday when they returned from the World Cup, reports Reuter.

Crowds mobbed the team plane at Bucharest Airport amid a sea of bobbing flags, and showered their idols with bouquets of flowers and champagne.

Women rushed forward to kiss team captain and star player Gheorghe Hagi and his teammates, and shouts of "Hagi is king, Maradona is out," rang out across the airfield.

Romania achieved their best ever World Cup performance in the United States. Stunning victories against Colombia and Argentina brough them into the top eight before they were knocked out by Sweden in the quarter-finals.

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CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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