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A COSTLY RED: Bangladesh goalkeeper Faisal Ahmed (R) leaves the pitch in tears after seeing a red card during their opening fixture of the AFC U-16 Championship Qualifiers against Saudi Arabia at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

AFC U-16 QUALIFIERS 10-man hosts suffer heavy defeat

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh conceded a 5-1 defeat against favourites Saudi Arabia, despite taking the lead, in their opening Group D fixture of the AFC U-16 Championship Qualifiers at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

The boys in red and green took a surprising lead on the half-hour mark, thanks to a clinical finish from Sarwar Zaman Nipu, who had timed his run to perfection on a defence splitting pass from Mostajeb Khan, but the hosts conceded the equaliser 11 minutes later before things took a turn for the worse at the other side of the break. The first-choice keeper Faisal Ahmed saw a straight red card for a lunging tackle on a Saudi Arabia striker in the 50th minute and that proved colossal. After his dismissal, Bangladesh conceded four goals, including three in the last ten minutes of the match.

The recently crowned SAFF U-16 champions had already turned into a lesser outfit ahead of this competition due to the absence of two key defenders -- Khalil Bhuiyan and Mohammad Atiquzzaman. And things got dicier for them after Faisal's dismissal and subsequent sacrifice of midfielder Hridoy Hossain. The speedy Saudi attackers made full use of their numerical advantage scoring goals with ease, as five different players including a substitute got on the scoresheet.

"We played according to our game plan before being reduced to 10 men. After that things went out of our control. We were actually beaten by the pace of the opposition," admitted Bangladesh coach Syed Golam Jilani at the post-match press conference.

Saudi Arabia coach Abdullah Al Alabdali had some words of encouragement for the hosts. "It was a tough game for us because we did not expect such fight from Bangladesh. The marching order and a penalty helped us. Bangladesh federation should look after these boys and give them more opportunities to flourish," said Alabdali.

Bangladesh will take on another Gulf nation, the United Arab Emirates, tomorrow.

BD in 'group of death'

Draw pits booters alongside Afghanistan, Maldives & Bhutan

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh have been placed alongside defending champions Afghanistan in Group B for this year's South Asian Football Federation (SAFF) Championship, the draw for which was held in New Delhi yesterday.

Maldives, the champions of the 2008 edition, and Bhutan are the other teams in Group B while Group A features five-time champions India and last edition's semifinalists Nepal alongside Pakistan and Sri Lanka.

The ninth edition of the regional football extravaganza, which has been branded as SAFF Suzuki Cup, will be held at the Trivandrum International Stadium in Kerala from December 23 to January 3.

Even though the current FIFA rankings may give a confusing indication, Group B is believed to be the tougher of the two groups as it features two of the strongest sides of South Asian region -- Afghanistan (130) and Maldives (177) -- alongside Bangladesh (173) and minnows Bhutan (164).

Bangladesh skipper Mamunul

GROUPINGS	
Group A:	India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka
Group B:	Afghanistan, Maldives, Bangladesh, Bhutan

BANGLADESH MATCHES	
Date	Match
December 24	Bangladesh v Afghanistan
December 26	Bangladesh v Maldives
December 28	Bangladesh v Bhutan

Islam dubbed the group as 'group of death', but said they are confident of at least making it to the last four.

"It is the group of death. It is a challenge for us to advance through the group stages, but we are confident that we can secure a place in the last four as well as in the final," said Mamunul.

Bangladesh, the champions of 2003 edition, played in three successive finals in 1999, 2003 and 2005 but failed to advance through the group stages in the last two editions in 2011 and 2013.

However, Bangladesh might find some confidence looking back at their head-to-head record against their group opponents as they have never lost against Bhutan (three wins and a draw) and Afghanistan (draw in single match) while holding a 2-1 advantage over Maldives

Big defeat for BD A

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh second-string side began their tour of India on the wrong foot as they went down to a thumping 96-run defeat against their counterparts in Bangalore yesterday.

After being asked to bat, India finished on a mammoth 322 for 7. In reply, the visitors were bundled out for 226 in 42.3 overs.

At the halfway mark, Bangladesh's plan to bowl first seemed to be working as they had reduced India to 125 for 5. The hosts though, fought back through their tail. Sanju Samson, Gurkeerat Singh and Rishi Dhawan -- batsmen number six, seven and eight -- scored fierce half-centuries to take the game away from Mominul Haque and co.

Not only did the visitors struggle to take wickets in the latter stages of the game, they also gave away more than 100 runs in the last eleven overs.

Bangladesh A head coach Heath Streak was disappointed with the bowling at the death.

"We started the first five overs badly. We gave away too many extras. Shafiu [Islam] bowled well but Taskin [Ahmed] struggled. He got injured eventually, which put us under more pressure.

"We had to use our part-time bowlers to complete the overs and that wasn't too helpful," said Streak.

"The execution wasn't as great in the death overs. That's something we will have to talk about before the next match," he added.

A similar scenario unfolded during Bangladesh's chase. India's left-arm pacer Sreenath Aravind ran through the top order. He removed Soumya Sarkar and Ron Talukdar in consecutive deliveries and was on a hat-trick. After 17 overs, the visitors were struggling at 87 for 5. However, just like the Indians, Bangladesh staged a comeback after the fall of the fifth wicket courtesy of a 120-run stand between Nasir Hossain and Liton Das.

The players were cautious at the start. But once they scored 50 runs, they began to unleash and raced towards their half-centuries. Liton scored a run-a-ball 75, while Nasir scored 52. However, once that stand was broken, the visitors crumbled.

"It was a mixed performance on the whole. At one stage we were 209 for 5 and the target was very much gettable. But [Suresh] Raina took a good catch to dismiss Nasir and that's when we lost the plot," said chief selector Faruque Ahmed, who is travelling with the team.

"After over number ten, the wicket becomes good for batting. The players know that now and I am sure they will improve a lot more in the next two matches. It's just a matter of time," added Faruque.

The next match is on Friday.

SCORES IN BRIEF

INDIA A: 322 for 7 (Samson 73, Gurkeerat 65, Dhawan 56; Nasir 2-51, Shafiu 2-60, Taskin 1-46, Sunny 1-57, Rubel 0-56)

BANGLADESH A: 226 all out in 42.3 overs (Liton 75, Nasir 52, Sabbir 25, Mominul 19, Rony 13, Soumya 9, Anamul 0; Gurkeerat 5-29)

U-14 TENNIS SERIES Popy, Suchona in final

SPORTS REPORTER

Popy Akter and Fabiha Lamisa Suchona moved into the girls' singles final of the Bengal Plastic Asian U-14 Tennis Series at the Ramna National Tennis Complex yesterday. Top-seed Popy beat third-seed Eti Akter in 6-4, 6-3 games while second-seed Suchona outplayed fourth-seed Shrivasti Dev in 6-1, 6-0 games in their respective semifinals.

In the boys' group, Mohammad Ishtiaq, Naimul Islam, Shadhin Hossain and Hridoy Hasan moved into the semifinals.

Meanwhile, Eti and Popy set up a final clash in girls' doubles against Zerine Sultana and Treepty pair, who beat Sadia and Sravasti pair.

BPL revived with 6 teams



BPL governing council member secretary IH Mallick (R) speaks to reporters in Mirpur yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

SPORTS REPORTER

The third edition of the Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) will roll onto grounds on November 24 with six teams; one less than the previous edition. The opening ceremony will be held two days before the tournament begins. The BPL's governing council confirmed the participating teams and the start of the trouble-hit Twenty20 competition during a press conference at Mirpur yesterday. However, there are still a number of aspects that are yet to be finalised.

"Akram Khan and Khaled Mahmud, our two directors, have been assigned to make a report about the player auction. The umpires committee will finalise the playing conditions. We are yet to take a decision about the quota of foreign players. Gradually everything will be finalised. We have chosen three venues -- Dhaka, Chittagong and Khulna -- but ultimately we will decide on two," informed BPL governing council member secretary IH Mallick.

Beximco Group snapped up highly-desired Dhaka franchise, while DBL Group settled for Chittagong. Axiom bought Barisal and Alif Group took Sylhet, while I Sports acquired Rangpur. Comilla, the newcomers, were bought by Royal Sports Ltd. The franchises from Rajshahi and Khulna were excluded.

"All the new organisations applied for their desired teams. Axiom wanted Barisal and we gave them verbal assurance as Alif Group didn't pay the dues then, but Alif

- Revenue will not be shared between BCB and franchise owners
- A decision is yet to be made about the players' auction
- Playing conditions are yet to be finalised
- Decision is yet to be taken about foreign players' quota

IN A NUTSHELL

Injured hours after call-up

Uncapped Surrey all-rounder Zafar Ansari's England debut could be in doubt after he was taken to hospital with a hand injury hours after getting his first Test call-up.

The 23-year-old was named in England's squad for the three-Test series against Pakistan.

The left-armer injured his bowling hand in a County Championship match against Lancashire.

Surrey director of cricket Alec Stewart said there was doubt over whether he would be fit to play for England.

"It should have been a day of celebration for Zafar. The way he was, there must be some doubt," he said.

"He dropped a catch stood at cover point. The ball came out of the sun, he saw it late and it hit him hard on the left thumb. He is not in the greatest shape."

Becks heading to UN

David Beckham has revealed plans to visit the United Nations headquarters to call for an end to child violence.

The 40-year-old is delivering the message as goodwill ambassador for UNICEF following his trip to Cambodia earlier this year.

Beckham will carry with him a letter signed by 18 child survivors of violence.

"I spent time with children and young people [in Cambodia] who have experienced terrible violence and abuse often at the hands of the people who were supposed to protect them," said Beckham in a statement. "Their stories were deeply distressing and as a father it is devastating to think that any child should have to suffer like

Stars to play for UK forces

A host of cricket stars, including India's ODI skipper Mahendra Singh Dhoni, will extend their support to the British Army by playing in an inaugural T20 cricket match fundraiser, 'Cricket for Heroes' to be held at The Kia Oval in London today.

Dhoni will join fellow cricketer Virender Sehwag, Pakistan skipper Shahid Afridi and South African ace Herschelle Gibbs in the Help for Heroes XI captained by England Director of Cricket Andrew Strauss.



Bangladesh A all-rounder Sabbir Rahman walks back to the pavilion with the cheers of the India A players ringing in his ears in Bangalore yesterday. PHOTO: PTI

Taskin's injury woes continue

SPORTS REPORTER



Pacer Taskin Ahmed's dream of making his Test debut against Australia next month received a huge blow as he injured himself during Bangladesh A's one-day match in Bangalore yesterday.

According to a Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) press release, Taskin suffered a left side strain and will be returning to Dhaka today. Uncapped pacer Kamrul Islam Rabbi has been named as his replacement and will join the team in Bangalore on Friday.

Prior to the second-string side's departure to India, there were talks about how this tour could be a base for the pacer to begin his career in Tests. Chief selector Faruque Ahmed had said that Taskin would be an option for the three-day matches against Karnataka and India A.

The pacer himself, during training last week, had revealed his wish of being available for selection for the Test matches against Australia.

The reason why Taskin hasn't featured in any of Bangladesh's Tests is because of the constant problems that he has faced with his tendons. His tendons had grown weak due to excessive pressure and that's why the BCB had kept him under a rehabilitation process, which stretched for years.

Recently though, Taskin had been discharged from his rehab and was deemed fit enough to return to the longer version of cricket. He bowled at length prior to the India tour and successfully managed to handle the pressure.

It was because of these reasons that there were hopes that Taskin -- who last played a Test in 2013 -- would be able to return to the format this year or at least begin the process of his comeback.

However, his latest injury seems to suggest that there is still a long road ahead of the bowler. The last time he suffered a side strain was in June this year, which led to him