

# SPORT

## Hosts brush Bhutan aside

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Bangladesh proved that they were still superior to Bhutan after handing them a 2-0 defeat in the SAFF Suzuki Cup at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Defender Tapu Barman and striker Mahbubur Rahman Sufil struck one goal each on either side of the break to give Bangladesh their first winning start in the regional football extravaganza in the past four editions.

Bangladesh could only post one win over the past three editions, which came against Bhutan in the last edition in Kerala in 2015. The men in red and green had then beaten Bhutan 3-0 before suffering a humiliating 3-1 defeat in October 2016.

Yesterday's victory over Bhutan not only served as revenge for that humiliating defeat but also gave the hosts a morale boost after the national team's recent lean patch.

English coach Jamie Day made only two changes to his Asian Games' playing eleven, drafting in left-back Wali Faisal and goalkeeper Shahidul Islam Sohel in place of Sushanta Tripura and Ashrafur Islam Rana, and the home side got off to a sparkling start after the kick-off in front of approximately 10,000 spectators.

With the crowd cheering on the boys in red and green, Bangladesh launched the first attack through the right flank with the combination of defender Bishwajit Gosh, winger Biplu Ahmed and forward Mahbubur Rahman Sufil, who ultimately shrugged off his marker and entered the box but was foiled by the defenders, who could only manage to clear it for a corner.

Saad Uddin was pushed in the back by a Bhutanese defender as he attempted to meet the ball from the flag-kick, prompting the Thai referee to blow the whistle for a penalty two minutes into the match.

Centre-back Tapu Barman, a member of the team that lost to Bhutan in 2016, stepped up and sent goalkeeper Tshering Dendup the wrong way as the home crowd went into a frenzy.

The early goal seemingly put the hosts on the back foot and Bhutan gained a foothold in midfield as they pressed for the equaliser. However, it was Bangladesh who went close to doubling their lead in the seventh minute from a counterattack which ended with Sufil failing to beat Dendup in a one-on-one situation.

Bhutan kept pressing and capitalised on the disorganised Bangladesh side but Chencho Gyeltshen squandered three opportunities to find the back of the Bangladesh net, much to the relief of custodian Sohel.

Bangladesh, who had been reduced to playing on the break, launched another good attack as Sufil nutmegged one defender before cutting back for Biplu Ahmed, but the Mohammedan winger's left-footed shot was well blocked by Dendup in the 35th minute.

Five minutes later, Bangladesh keeper Sohel misjudged the flight of a corner kick which fell to an unmarked Chencho, who missed the mark.

After resumption, Bangladesh looked more organised in every sector and deservedly doubled their lead two minutes into the second half with Sufil driving home a powerful shot from inside the box to secure the result.



**BANGLADESH 2 - 0 BHUTAN**  
TAPU BARMAN 3'  
SUFIL 47'

Defender Tapu Barman (R) gave Bangladesh the lead as early as the third minute with a clinical low shot from a penalty in their opening SAFF Championship match against Bhutan at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday. Striker Mahabubur Rahman Sufil (L) also showed his class with an early second-half strike in a 2-0 win.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## 'We deserved this victory'

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After nearly two years of incessant talk about that infamous defeat against Bhutan in 2016, the boys in red and green could not

be any happier after vanquishing their unlikely tormentors.

The players were eagerly waiting to prove that the 1-3 defeat to Bhutan in the Himalayan nation's home ground in Thimphu was an upset, and Bangladesh did it in style with a 2-0 win in their opening match of the SAFF Championship at their own fortress yesterday.

English coach Jamie Day was instrumental in

building a balanced side that looked determined on the field and successfully carried out the game plan.

"I am extremely pleased to win the game. The boys played very well. I think we deserved to win tonight, though it was tough," said Day at the post-match briefing.

Defender Tapu Barman put Bangladesh ahead in the first half before Mahbubur Rahman Sufil ensured the win with a brilliant strike in the second half.

"Sufil got behind the ball in a good position and scored a good goal. We needed the early lead and we got two," said Day, who chose goalkeeper Shahidul Alam Sohel instead of Ashrafur Islam

Rana, the keeper in the Asian Games.

"Sohel has a big physique that kept him ahead of Rana and Sohel kept a clean sheet and helped secure the maximum three points. We don't need to look for lapses in our defence, but only positives," added Day.

Day however did not want to make any comment on that infamous defeat against Bhutan. "Let's talk about the positives."

Midfielder Masuk Mia Jonny was ecstatic while celebrating a win after a long gap.

"It feels good to win after a while, so we are really happy with this victory," said Jonny. "There was no pressure on us as the coach instructed us to play easy rather than taking any pressure."

## Not enough festivity

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The SAFF Championship kicked off at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday afternoon amid little fanfare, glitz or glamour.

There was no opening ceremony before the tournament's first match between Nepal and Pakistan and outside the stadium there was only a single banner on the outermost walls of the facility through which one could ascertain that this was indeed the venue for the regional extravaganza.

Perhaps there could have been a few more decorations and banners in place but that still does not excuse the fact that, once again, the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) has failed to catch the eyes of fans.

The crowd at the home of Bangladesh football was sparse at best during the first fixture of the day. However when the host Bangladesh turned up to play the day's second match against Bhutan the stadium became half-full.

Bhutan coach Trevor Morgan, when asked about his thoughts on the general arrangements, simply replied: "At least they're ready [pointing to his players]."

Advertisement, it seemed, was solely confined to a few ticket hawkers who belted out "receipt! receipt!".

## Woakes, Pope recalled

AFP, London

Chris Woakes and Ollie Pope have been included in the England squad for the final Test against India as Alastair Cook prepares for his international farewell at The Oval.

Warwickshire all-rounder Woakes and Surrey batsman Pope are added to group that will prepare for the fifth Test that starts on Friday in London.

England wrapped up a 3-1 series success with their 60-run victory in the fourth Test in Southampton.

That sets the stage for Essex batsman Cook to take the spotlight on what will be the former England captain's final appearance for his country.

## Ali deals a knockout blow

Pakistan snatch 95th-minute winner against Nepal

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Pakistan returned to international football after a three-year hiatus with a bang as a 95th-minute winner saw them

hand a 2-1 defeat to Nepal in the opening match of the SAFF Suzuki Cup at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Muhammad Ali headed Pakistan to a win in stoppage time after marksman Hassan Naveed Bashir's first-half opener was cancelled out by Bimal Gharti Magar. It was a happy return to international football for Pakistan, who played their last match against Yemen in February 2015.

Pakistan were forced to skip the previous edition of the SAFF Championship in Kerala due to internal problems as well as a court verdict on the Pakistan Football Federation. However, they

took the first steps to a full-fledged international return last month in the Asian Games, where their Olympic team defeated their Nepalese counterparts 2-1 -- a scoreline that was replicated yesterday.

Pakistan may have come away with a win but the Himalayan boys drew attention for their fast-paced play, which kept Pakistan under tremendous pressure from the start. However, Pakistan took the lead against the run of play as Bashir converted a penalty in the 34th minute after defender Biraj Maharjan pushed down Muhammad Riaz inside the danger zone.

After resumption, Nepal exerted immense pressure as they pushed for the equaliser and finally levelled in the 82nd minute, Bimal expertly placing home a glancing header from substitute Niranjan Khadka.

However, Nepal failed to hold onto the point as Pakistan came out of their defensive shell and

snatched the win following a nice move; building up the attack from the left that resulted in Muhammad Adil whipping in a cross for Saaduddin, who drifted away in chase before setting up Ali with a backwards header that Ali headed home easily from the edge of the six-yard box.

"This win is very important for Pakistan, not just for the players and the team but also for the federation and people of the country. We need to keep playing and the players need to show the same spirit in the next matches," said Pakistan coach Jose Antonio Nogueira.

Meanwhile, Nepal coach Bal Gopal Maharjan was left lamenting his players' mistakes.

"We conceded both goals due to a lack of focus from the defenders. However, there were some positives in the match as we played very well and created a few goals scoring chances in the second half. Sadly we could not cash in on those chances."

## Shah, Hafeez left out

AGENCIES, Lahore



To be led by Sarfraz Ahmed, Pakistan have named a 16-man squad for the 2018 Asia Cup set to begin in the United Arab Emirates from 15

September. The 18-year-old fast bowler Shaheen Afridi has been included in the squad while opening batsman Shan Masood has also received a call-up for the six-nation tournament. Experienced cricketers Yasir Shah, Mohammad Hafeez and Imad Wasim have been left out.

The rest of the squad remains unchanged from the last one-day international series Pakistan featured in, a five-match face-off against Zimbabwe. Top-order batsmen Babar Azam, Haris Sohail, Imamul Haq and Pakistan's first-ever ODI double centurion Fakhar Zaman make a power-packed batting line-up that will also have the experience of Shoaib Malik and Safraz.

Mohammad Amir will lead the fast bowling attack and will be assisted by Hasan Ali, Usman Khan Shinwari, Junaid Khan and Afridi. Faheem Ashraf has been picked as the specialist all-rounder and Shadab Khan is the specialist spinner.

Masood, who has played 12 Tests but no limited-overs matches for Pakistan after having debuted in 2013, has been rewarded for his excellent performances in List-A cricket. The 28-year-old has scored three centuries and five half-centuries in last 10 innings and is now in line to receive his ODI cap.

Afridi, Pakistan's highest wicket-taker in the ICC Under-19 Cricket World Cup 2018 in New Zealand, was blooded into the T20I squad during the home series against the West Indies and will now potentially make his ODI debut as well.

While the selection committee headed by the new PCB chairman Ehsan Mani has focused on youth, two veterans in Hafeez and Shah have been omitted from the squad. Hafeez had a disappointing tour of Zimbabwe, returning seven and zero the two T20I innings he played while Shah failed to impress with returns of 1/10 and 0/31 from two ODIs.

Pakistan begin their Asia Cup campaign with a league game against the winner of the ongoing Asia Cup Qualifier on 16 September.

Squad: Sarfraz Ahmed (captain), Fakhar Zaman, Imamul Haq, Shan Masood, Babar Azam, Shoaib Malik, Asif Ali, Haris Sohail, Shadab Khan, Mohammad Nawaz, Faheem Ashraf, Hasan Ali, Mohammad Amir, Junaid Khan, Usman Khan Shinwari and Shaheen Shah Afridi.



Pakistan forward Muhammad Ali (L) runs for joy after his 95th-minute winner against Nepal in the opening match of the SAFF Championship at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

**PAKISTAN 2 - 1 NEPAL**  
HASSAN NAVEED 34'  
MUHAMMAD ALI 90+5'  
BIMAL GHARTI 42'

PHOTO: STAR