

Booters get familiar foes

Pitted against India, Afghanistan, Oman and Qatar in Group E

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh have been pitted against 2022 World Cup hosts and 2019 Asian Cup champions Qatar along with Oman and South Asian rivals India and Afghanistan in Group E of Joint Qualifiers for Qatar World Cup and China Asian Cup when the 40-team draw of Asia was held at the headquarters of AFC in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia yesterday.

183rd-FIFA ranked Bangladesh are the lowest-ranked side in the group while Qatar have highest rank at 55 followed by Oman (86), India (101) and Afghanistan (149). However, Bangladesh may feel lucky to have got two opponents -- India and Afghanistan -- who have often faced in the SAFF Championships. This draw seems a bit easier compared to the last edition of qualifiers where they faced the then Asian champions Australia along with Jordan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Bangladesh ended up with only one point from eight matches.

Interestingly, Bangladesh are going to face India in FIFA World Cup Qualifiers for the second time. The first time the two teams faced was in 1985 for Mexico



I'm very happy with the grouping because the last time we were in a strong group but this time we have very good chance against India and Afghanistan.

JAMAL BHUIYAN
BANGLADESH CAPTAIN



We will just do our best in every game. We will try to cause upset in the matches. Aim is to try to qualify for the Asian Cup.

JAIME DAY
BANGLADESH COACH

World Cup, with India winning both encounters by 2-1 margin. Bangladesh have the experience of playing against all the opponents except for Oman.

Bangladesh team's coach Jamie Day and captain Jamal Bhuiyan were satisfied with the draw and they apparently want to qualify for the Asian Cup third round directly by finishing third in the five-team group.

"I am very excited by the draw today [Wednesday]. We know it is going to be very tough for us especially as all are ranked higher but it is good to have World Cup hosts Qatar and India which will be fantastic experience and occasion for the staff and the players involved," Day expressed his reaction over the grouping from England.

Asked whether the opponents

FIXTURE		
Date	Match	Venue
10 Sept, 2019	Afghanistan vs Bangladesh	Away
10 Oct, 2019	Bangladesh vs Qatar	Home
15 Oct, 2019	India vs Bangladesh	Away
14 Nov, 2019	Oman vs Bangladesh	Away
26 March, 2020	Bangladesh vs Afghanistan	Home
31 March, 2020	Qatar vs Bangladesh	Away
4 June, 2020	Bangladesh vs India	Home
9 June, 2020	Bangladesh vs Oman	Home

this time could be considered easier compared to the last edition, Day said. "I don't know from last time. All I know is on the ranking the four other teams are far greater than us so we can just enjoy the experience and play with no pressure."

The 39-year-old coach does not want to consider past records against India and Afghanistan as he said he was not with the team when Bangladesh last played against those teams.

"I haven't played against them [India and Afghanistan], so the past doesn't really matter but we need to try to use our home ground to the best advantage," said Day.

Captain Jamal Bhuiyan, though, was ecstatic as he sees good chance of winning matches against India and Afghanistan.

BARTON CHARGED WITH ACTUAL BODILY HARM

Fleetwood manager Joey Barton was charged with actual bodily harm on Wednesday following an alleged incident during a third tier match at Barnsley in April. Former Manchester City and Marseille midfielder Barton has "emphatically denied" accusations that he confronted Barnsley manager Daniel Stendel in the Oakwell tunnel. In a statement, South Yorkshire Police said: "A man has been charged following an incident at Barnsley Football Club in April 2019." Joseph Barton, 36, of Fox Bank Close, Widnes, has been charged with actual bodily harm contrary to section 47 assault and has been bailed to appear before Barnsley Magistrates Court on Wednesday 9 October 2019.



Pogba central to rebuilding plans, says Solskjaer

REUTERS, Manchester



Manchester United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer is eager to build his team around midfielder Paul Pogba despite media speculation linking the French World Cup winner with a move away from Old Trafford ahead of the new Premier League campaign.

Pogba's agent recently told The Times that the 26-year-old intends to leave the club, while the player said in Tokyo last month he could seek a new challenge elsewhere amid reports linking him to Juventus and Real Madrid.

"Paul is a fantastic player, a fantastic human being and has always been a great professional," Solskjaer told reporters in Perth.

"I said (previously), 'if he's in your squad, you'd build your team around him'. I haven't changed that much since then, so I'd say the same now."

Pogba, who joined United from Juventus in 2016 for a then-world record fee of 89.3 million pounds (\$110.83 million), has blown hot and cold in his second stint at the club despite scoring 31 goals in 142 appearances.

"We know Paul has been criticised by a few but he's loved by loads more," Solskjaer added.

"The ones that might want to leave (the club) now haven't been here when it's been successful. Hopefully they want to be part of that. I want to be part of it."

United, who finished sixth last season, kick off their new league campaign against Chelsea at Old Trafford on August 11.

BD's maiden win in indoor hockey

SPORTS REPORTER

Moinul Islam Koushik scored six goals to guide Bangladesh to their maiden win in Indoor Hockey Asia Cup in a massive 9-0 win against Philippines in their third pool match in Chonburi, Thailand yesterday.

Bangladesh took a comfortable 6-0 lead in the first half against Philippines, with Koushik scoring four goals and Ashraf Islam and Rasel Mahmud Jimmy getting one each.

Bangladesh added three more goals after break, with Koushik scoring twice and Jimmy hitting the board once.

Bangladesh will play their fourth and final pool match against Thailand today.

Magpies gamble on Bruce

AFP, London



Newcastle risked stoking the anger of their frustrated fans by hiring former Sunderland boss Steve Bruce as their head coach on Wednesday.

Bruce has agreed a three-year contract with the Premier League club, but his appointment to succeed Rafael Benitez wasn't met with universal approval by Newcastle supporters.

"Newcastle United can now announce that Steve Bruce has been appointed as the club's new head coach," the club said on their official website.

Former Manchester United defender Bruce, who resigned from Championship side Sheffield Wednesday prior to joining Newcastle, said: "I'm delighted and incredibly proud to be appointed as head coach of Newcastle United."

"This is my boyhood club and it was my dad's club, so this is a very special moment for me and my family."

The 58-year-old might be a local boy after growing up on Tyneside, but his two-year spell as coach of Newcastle's fierce rivals Sunderland and a mediocre record as

a Premier League manager are major black marks for an already angry fan base.

Some Newcastle supporters are furious that controversial Newcastle owner Mike Ashley failed to keep the popular Benitez at St James' Park after more than three years with the club.

Benitez was recently appointed manager of Chinese Super League club Dalian Yifang and said he left at the end of the season because his Newcastle vision was not shared with "those at the top of the club."

Ashley has been criticised for failing to back his previous managers in the transfer market, while former England boss Sam Allardyce reportedly turned down the chance to return for a second spell as Newcastle manager following Benitez's exit.

Manchester City assistant Mikel Arteta had also been linked with the job, as were former Manchester United boss David Moyes and Belgium manager Roberto Martinez.

But Lee Charnley, managing director at Newcastle United, said the club was pleased to appoint a coach of Bruce's "vast experience and connections..." "The hard work for Steve and his team starts immediately and we will be fully prepared for the challenge of a new Premier League season," he added.



Barcelona's Dutch midfielder Frenkie de Jong (C) controls the ball next to teammates during a pre-season training session at the Joan Gamper training ground in Sant Joan Despi yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

PSG owner sues media outlets

AFP, Paris



Paris Saint-Germain owner Nasser Al-Khelaifi is suing three media outlets over an article suggesting he requested an illegal payment to be made to an agent involved in Javier Pastore's transfer from Palermo in 2011.

Al-Khelaifi's lawyers issued a statement Tuesday announcing the action against French online site Mediapart, British newspaper The Guardian and German daily Der Spiegel.

The outlets are accused of not allowing

Al-Khelaifi a chance to reply fully to their questions by refusing to give him a copy of a letter at the source of the article.

Al-Khelaifi's lawyers say they wrote to the three publications casting doubt on the authenticity of this letter, and asked to see it to prove the point.

According to Mediapart the letter is from Al-Khelaifi to the chief of staff to the emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani asking for two million euros (\$224 million) for Pastore's agent.

A further \$200,000 was sought for a private company run by his brother.

Taijul's fifer restricts PCA to 331

SPORTS REPORTER

BCB XI left-arm spinner Taijul Islam bagged a fifer to help restrict Dr. DY Patil Cricket Academy to 331 on the second day of their four-day match in the ongoing Dr (Capt) K. Thimmappiah Memorial tournament at M. Chinnaswamy Stadium in India yesterday.

Dr. DY Patil Cricket Academy started the day on an overnight score of 300 for eight before Taijul scalped the remaining two wickets and bundled the opposition out for 331 in 102.5 overs. Taijul, who was called up to the Bangladesh ODI team for the upcoming Sri Lanka tour, slated to begin with the first ODI on July 26, returned with impressive figures of six for 144.

Coming in to bat, BCB XI finished the day on 261 for five in 73 overs. BCB XI started off brightly as the two openers -- Shadman Islam and Jahurul Islam -- strung together a 93-run opening stand before Shadman was dismissed in the 31st over after scoring 49. Although BCB XI lost a few quick wickets in the middle, Kazi Nurul Hossain and Saif Hasan remained unbeaten on 67 and 27 runs respectively.



Bangladesh under-19 players pose for a photograph at the ECB Performance Centre in England yesterday ahead of today's practice match against Young Lions Invitational XI. They will play their first match of the tri-series against England on July 22.

PHOTO: BCB

Mane out to press Ballon d'Or case

AFP, Cairo



After a Champions League title with Liverpool, Sadio Mane is out to conquer a second continent in as many months as Senegal attempt to capture a first Africa Cup of Nations title against Algeria in Friday's final in Cairo.

A calf injury ruined Mane's 2015 Cup of Nations, while his missed penalty knocked the team out in a quarterfinal shootout two years ago, and he has already twice failed from the spot in Egypt.

Mirroring the fortunes of the Teranga Lions, often favourites but never champions, the 27-year-old has sometimes disappointed, although he likely holds the key to Senegal erasing 60 years of hurt in African football.

Coming off his most prolific Premier League season, finishing in a three-way tie for the golden boot with 22 goals, and a European crown in June, Mane is the face of a new, successful generation and deserves recognition in the battle for the revered Ballon d'Or.

As the spearhead of a team that returned to the World Cup in 2018 after a 16-year absence, Mane has guided his side to the Cup of Nations final, the country's second after 2002, with three goals and an assist at this tournament.

"He has something unique, nothing is predictable with him. There is no plan he can be held to. He can make the difference at any moment, with a dribble, a pass or a sudden attack," said Senegal coach Aliou Cisse.

He has made Mane the focal point of a fearsome, yet ever-changing attack amid

the shuffling of Ismaila Sarr, Keita Balde and Krepin Diatta around the consistent presence of Mbaye Niang and Mane.

In the absence of the suspended Kalidou Koulibaly, the forward will be forced to assume added responsibilities to get his hands on the trophy, an obsession for Senegal and their coach, who was the captain of the runners-up 17 years ago.

"I'm even ready to swap a Champions League for a Cup of Nations. Going to Dakar with the trophy would be extraordinary. It would be my wildest dream," Mane told France Football ahead of the competition.

Victory in two days' time would put Mane in esteemed company as one of just a handful of players with both Champions League and Cup of Nations honours, joining the likes of Cameroon's Samuel Eto'o, Ivorian pair Salomon Kalou and Yaya Toure, Nigerians Finidi George and John Obi Mikel, Ghana's Abedi Pele and Rabah Madjer of Algeria.

It would also make a compelling argument for Mane's Ballon d'Or prospects, with Liberia's George Weah, in 1995, the only African to have claimed the prestigious prize. In front of him though stand the irrepressible duo of Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo, as well as club teammate Alisson, Brazil's Copa America-winning goalkeeper.

"You can't think about the Ballon d'Or. What's important for Sadio is that he continues to fight for the team and delivers performances. He's in that mindset. My talks with him are clear: give everything for the team, and the team will give you it back," said Cisse.

"He's a boy whose head is screwed on right, who understands the team will always come before individuals."

Gopalganj runners-up in Asian Cities Chess

SPORTS REPORTER

Gopalganj of Bangladesh became runners-up with 14 points in the Asian Cities Chess Team Championship at the FARS Hotel in Dhaka yesterday.

Tehran of Iran, who had already confirmed their title, ended unbeaten champions with 18 game points from nine rounds. Kolkata of India became third despite having 14 points, equal with Gopalganj.

BNSCB Chess Team of Dhaka became fourth with 12 points; Shah Alam City of Malaysia finished fifth with nine points while Chattogram City became sixth with eight points.

In the last round, Tehran beat Colombo City by 3-1 game points, Gopalganj beat Lalithpur of Nepal by 4-0 game points while Kolkata beat Kathmandu by 2.5-1.5 game points.

A total 12 teams from nine countries participated in the event, which is also called Dubai Cup. Champion Tehran received 3000 dollars while runners-up Gopalganj and third-placed Kolkata received 1500 dollars each. There were also individual awards on offer for the three best players on each board.