

# SPORT



Whoever gets the chance to stand between the sticks today, Ashraf Islam Rana (R) and understudies know they will have to play out of their skins to keep Asian champions Qatar at bay in their World Cup Qualifying fixture at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today.

## 'There are no big or small teams in Asia'

SPORTS REPORTER

Although there is a gulf of quality between the two sides in terms of the FIFA rankings, Asian champions Qatar will not be taking hosts Bangladesh lightly when they meet today in a joint qualifier of the World Cup and Asian Cup.

"We really wish for a good thing like a win, but everyone knows it will not be easy because Asian football today is totally different. It's not like there are big and small teams; we are all the same," Qatari striker Ali Hassan Afif Yahya said at a pre-match press conference at the BFF House yesterday.

"I believe there are no small or big teams. I believe in the correct spirit of the players -- about what they want or don't want -- and this will make the difference in tomorrow's game. We came here with a strategy and good preparation. Of course, we are not satisfied with the Indian result [a 0-0 draw]. We want three points but honestly we know it won't be easy and we have to do our best. We trust ourselves, we believe in ourselves. I hope it will be good for us," Afif added.

The visitors might have seemed serious, but their arrival in the early hours of the day

before the match says something else entirely. Qatar are a strong side with naturalised footballers like Sudanese-born Alimoez Ali and Musab Khidir, Egyptian-born Ahmed Alaaeldin, Algerian-born Boualem Khoukhi, Spanish-born Karim Bouadif and Iraqi-born Bassam Husham Alrawi.

Coach Felix Sanchez also seemed cautious but wants to leave with three full points, especially after the result against India.

"It is a matter of opinion whether we did well or not against India. We played our game. Obviously, we would prefer a result because it is football. As Ali said, there are no favourites. If you want to be favourites, you need to deliver on the pitch. We are going to try to improve our level and performance and play our game in line with our strengths. We will try to get good result but we know it's going to be difficult because of the level of their position and many other facts," the Spaniard said, opining that Bangladesh may have an advantage from long throw-ins.

"We watched Bangladesh's last game and know their strengths. Set pieces such as long throw-ins are a good opportunity for them. They prefer more organised attacks. They will try to play their way and we will try to play our way."



FELIX SANCHEZ

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Colossal task for booters

Bangladesh take on Qatar today

SPORTS REPORTER

While a draw against the reigning Asian champions may be deemed as good as a win for Bangladesh, coach Jamie Day was still aiming for a win over a strong Qatar in today's 2022 World Cup Qualifier match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

The action will kick off at 7:00pm with BTV and Bangla TV carrying the live telecast of the match.

Qatar -- sitting 125 places higher than 187-ranked Bangladesh in the FIFA rankings -- are well and truly ahead of Bangladesh in terms of skill, technique and tactics. In that context, matching or bettering Qatar today seems like a pipedream but Day still retained the belief that it was possible.

"We worked on how we can stop Qatar and possibly try to capitalise on their weaknesses over the last seven days. Every team wants to win and we also want to win the game. Qatar will be expecting to win but for me, as long as my boys do their best and perform to the level we have shown, I can't ask for anything more. If we get a little bit of luck as well, then you never know," said Day at the pre-match press conference at the BFF house yesterday.

Qatar, the host nation of the 2022 FIFA World Cup, endured a frustrating goalless draw against India last month but rediscovered their groove in a 6-0 thrashing of Afghanistan, who had beaten Bangladesh 1-0 last month.

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**JAMIE DAY**  
BANGLADESH COACH

suspensions mean that Bangladesh's British coach will not be able to field his best eleven.

The backline is believed to be the most vulnerable following injury to Tutul Hossain Badsha and the suspension of Bishwanath Ghosh. Young Riyadul Hasan and Raihan Hasan are likely to replace them, with centre-back Badsha also available for selection according to Day.

Brave face in front of the media notwithstanding, Day is very likely to park the bus in front of their own goal. Captain Jamal Bhuiyan also thought that there would be no alternative to defending well.

"They are the number one team in Asia. Tomorrow's [Thursday's] match will be much harder. We will not have so many chances but we have to take the ones we get; otherwise they will punish us. We have to be better in front of goal," said Jamal, who helped Bangladesh U-23 beat Qatar 1-0 in the Asian Games last year and was seeking inspiration from India's goalless draw against Qatar.

Against big teams Bangladesh have usually aimed to avoid humiliation or keep the margin respectable, but Jamal believed that things have changed markedly under Day.

"The team is now more organised and does not concede many goals under Day. We now have a group of players who are more disciplined," said Jamal.

In previous encounters, Bangladesh held Qatar 1-1 and lost 0-4 in the Asian Nations Cup Qualifiers in 1979 before conceding two more defeats (1-4 and 0-3) in the 2006 competition.

## U-15s off to a winning start

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh got off to a winning start in the SAFF Under-15 Women's Championship with a 2-0 victory over Bhutan at the Changlimithang Stadium in Thimphu yesterday.

First half goals from Shaheda Akter Ripa and Rozina Akter settled the tie in favour of the Red and Greens, who wasted a number of scoring opportunities in the second half.

The 2017-edition champions started the game brightly, with Ripa proving a handful for the Bhutan defenders, but it took Bangladesh 22 minutes to open their account. Ripa beat Bhutan goalkeeper Norbu Zangmo with a fine volley from the edge of the box after being set up by Rehana Akter.

Rozina doubled Bangladesh's lead nine minutes later with an excellent solo effort, sliding the ball past the Bhutan goalkeeper following a darting move into the box from the left side.

The game was disrupted twice by floodlight failure, first towards the end of the first half and then at the start of the second half, but Bangladesh continued to dominate the hosts. However, Golam Rabbani Choton's charges failed to convert their possessional superiority into a goal as most of their efforts were from outside the box which failed to trouble the Bhutan goalkeeper. Skipper Shamsunnahar wasted the easiest chance of the half in the 75th minute as she failed to control the ball in front of goal.

This was the lowest margin of victory for Bangladesh over Bhutan in this competition's history, having beaten the same opponents by 3-0 and 5-0 margin on previous two occasions.

Bangladesh will play their next match against Nepal, who were beaten 4-1 by India in the opening match of the championship, tomorrow.

## Bangladesh A outplayed in 1st one-dayer

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh A's winless streak on their tour of Sri Lanka continued after they suffered a seven-wicket thumping at the hands of Sri Lanka A in the first one-dayer of a three-match series at the R Premadasa Stadium in Colombo yesterday.

Electing to bat, Bangladesh A were bundled out for a paltry 116 in just 33.3 overs and the hosts took just 25.5 overs to chase it down, ending on 120 for the loss of three wickets.

Bangladesh A opener Saif Hassan scored a team-high 32 off 42 balls while only three other batsmen managed double-digit scores. Skipper Ashan Priyanjan was the pick of the bowlers for the home side, returning figures of four for 10 in 4.3 overs.

After the exchange, although Sri Lanka A lost two quick wickets to be reduced to 21 for two in 6.1 overs, Priyanjan's unbeaten 62-ball 50 and a 37-ball 24 from Priyamal Perera helped Sri Lanka romp to victory with 145 balls to spare.

Earlier on tour, a two-match four-day series between the sides ended in a 0-0 draw.

## Double the points for away wins: Kohli

India-South Africa second Test starts today

AFP, Pune

India cricket skipper Virat Kohli on Wednesday called for a change in the points system for the new World Test Championship, saying that an away win should get double the reward.

He insisted that the new championship has already improved

standards in Tests.

"If you would have asked me to make the points table, I would give double the points for an away Test win," Kohli said in Pune ahead of his side's second Test against South Africa.

He said the change could be made for the second tournament. The first championship that started on August 1 will see the nine top nations competing in series over two years.

That's the big thing the Test Championship has changed. In the past, if you had a below-average pitch, you got a warning, whereas now you get deducted points.

**FAF DU PLESSIS**  
SOUTH AFRICA CAPTAIN

The top two teams in the league will dispute a final.

According to Kohli, the new championship format has given Test cricket a shot in the arm.

"In earlier situations, in a three-match series you probably would have played out a draw, but teams are going to go for wins and get those extra points. So I think it's great for Test cricket," he said.

"It will be much more demanding on the players now, which is a good thing as it will keep the standard of Test cricket high."

Kohli also hailed the turnaround by his new batting and bowling heroes Rohit Sharma and Mohammed Shami in the South Africa series.

Sharma hit 176 and 127 in his first outing as Test opener, playing a key role in India's first Test win alongside his five-wicket haul in the final innings.



Bangladesh under-21 player Mahbub Hossain (L) manoeuvres the ball past an Omani defender during their second match of the five-match series at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday. The match ended in a 2-2 draw. PHOTO: STAR

## Oman hold hosts to a 2-2 draw

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh under-21 were held to a 2-2 draw by their Omani counterparts in the second match of the five-match series as part of preparation for next year's Junior Asia Cup at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

The hosts, who won the first match 5-1 on Tuesday, struggled to open the account against the visiting side in the first two quarters before Mahbub Hossain broke the deadlock from a field goal in the 31st minute.

But the lead lasted only three minutes as Oman bit back through a penalty corner converted by Rashad Al-Fazari, who had also scored the lone goal on Tuesday for Oman. Al-Fazari then gave the lead in the 41st minute.

However, Bangladesh did not waste much time to level the margin as Sohanur Rahman Sabuj scored in the 43rd minute.

The third match of the series will take place tomorrow.

## U-19s fall to first loss in NZ

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Under-19s, who clinched the five-match one-day series by winning the first three matches of a five-match series, tasted their first loss on tour when hosts New Zealand Under-19 won the fourth over ODI by four wickets at the Bert Sutcliffe Oval in Lincoln yesterday.

Despite Bangladesh posting a competitive 295 for eight after being asked to bat, New Zealand were able to chase down the target in 49.1 overs with four wickets in hand.

Opener Tanzid Hasan and Parvez Hossain gave the young Tigers a decent start as they stitched together a 71-run stand before the former was dismissed in the 12th over for a 44-ball 51. Bangladesh then lost a few quick wickets in the middle overs, but a 104-run fifth-wicket stand between Towhid Hridoy (73 off 77) and skipper Akbar Ali (66 off 44) helped the hosts wrest the momentum back and post a total that would have allowed thoughts of a fourth straight win.

After the exchange however, Fergus Lellman's 71-ball 76 and an unbeaten 77-ball 66 from skipper Jesse Tashkoff helped New Zealand register their first victory in the series with five balls to spare.



India captain Virat Kohli tosses the ball during training yesterday ahead of the second Test against South Africa in Pune. PHOTO: AFP