



Saad Uddin (R) is chased by his ecstatic teammates after the forward gave Bangladesh the lead in the first half of their World Cup qualifying fixture against India at the Salt Lake Stadium in Kolkata yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Bangladesh denied once more

ANISUR RAHMAN from Kolkata



Bangladesh were once again deprived of a win by India when they surrendered a first-half lead to play out a 1-1 draw against the Blue Tigers in the 2022 World Cup qualifying encounter at the Salt Lake Stadium in Kolkata yesterday.

Jamie Day's charges held their lead, provided by Saad Uddin, for 46 minutes before Adil Khan levelled for India with a powerful header in the 88th minute. It was the third time in a row that Bangladesh were denied of a first win over India in 16 years.

Bangladesh captain Jamal Bhuiyan told Indian journalists on the eve of the match that they were going to break Indian spectators' hearts and it was the Bangladesh captain who initiated the goal with a brilliant curving shot which beat goalkeeper Gurpreet Singh Sandhu and right-winger Saad Uddin unleashed a clinical leaping header to silence India.

Bangladesh got off to a flying start in front of a near-capacity crowd when left-winger Mohammad Ibrahim darted into the box from the left flank in the first minute before Rahul Bheka tackled him from behind, conceding no more than a corner as Syrian referee Masoud Tufayelieh overlooked a clear foul that would have meant a penalty kick for Bangladesh.

Bangladesh 1 – 1 India
Saad Uddin 42' Adil Khan 88'

India then started controlling the game, keeping the Bangladesh backline on their toes and Sunil Chhetri came close to taking the lead but his side-volley from inside the box went straight to the gloves of goalkeeper Ashraf Islam Rana in the fourth minute.

The men in red and green kept their feet firmly on the ground and went on the counter in every transition. Yeasin Khan miscued a header off a Jamal corner in the 14th minute before India's Bheka narrowly missed the target off an Anirudha Thapa corner in the next minute.

Under pressure from India, Yeasin Khan conceded a free-kick from the edge of the box in the 24th minute, but Shahal Abdul Samad failed to convert.

Bangladesh created a chance eight minutes later when Biplu Ahmed, availing a through-pass from Jamal and a fumble from Adil Khan, entered the box and hit a fierce diagonal low ball for Nabib Newaj Jibon, who failed to connect as an Indian defender cleared it for a corner.

Goalkeeper Rana then tipped over a goal-bound header from Manvir Singh before Riyadul Hasan headed a long throw-in from Raihan Hasan wide of the far post in the 37th minute.

Five minutes later, Bangladesh got on the board with Saad's header.

After resumption, India pressed hard for the equaliser but the backline -- marshalled by Yeasin, Riyadul, Raihan and Rahmat Mia -- held firm against the hosts, who then twice nearly conceded the second.

In the 51st minute, Biplu sent a defence-splitting through-pass to striker Jibon, who received the ball well to place the far post from the left-hand box, but onrushing goalkeeper Gurpreet saved the day by coming out of the post in the 51st minute. Four minutes later, Ibrahim danced past two Indian defenders to muster a left-footer but the woodwork denied Bangladesh, much to the relief of Gurpreet.

India came close to level the margin on the hour mark but Riyadul Hasan made a goalline save off a header from Anas Edathodika.

Bangladesh once again went close to a second when Jibon, receiving a long ball from Jamal, sent the ball over Gurpreet and towards the goal but defender Adil back-volleyed the ball from goalline. Jamie Day sent three pairs of fresh legs in place of Raihan, Jibon and Ibrahim to resist the constant attack from India, who worked hard in the attacking third but could not break the backline with Yeasin Khan leading the way.

However, Bangladesh were finally beaten with a powerful header from Adil off a corner from substitute Fernandes in the 88th minute.

'Our support will surprise India'

SPORTS REPORTER from Kolkata



Former Bangladesh striker Alfaz Ahmed did not get a chance to play at the Salt Lake Stadium wearing the red and green jersey but he had the experience of playing at the venue for Mohammedan SC (Dhaka) as well as Mohun Bagan FC.

The 46-year-old former Bangladesh international was present at the Salt Lake Stadium with fellow former national footballer Sheikh Belal Ahmed, who was known for his long throw-ins, to support the national football team against India in their 2022 World Cup qualifying match.

"I played in different countries while playing for the national team but I never watched the performance of the national team beyond our borders. So, the dream came true today," said Alfaz, who fondly reminisced about an IFA Shield match between Mohammedan SC and East Bengal that took three hours to end, with the Bangladesh outfit losing.

"It is a really good feeling to watch a Bangladesh match from the gallery. If Bangladesh win, the whole picture of Bangladesh football will change," opined Alfaz, who was accompanied by some officials of Uttar Baridhara Club where Alfaz will be acting as head coach in the upcoming season.

"I have come here to support our team and watch a historic win over India, although Sunil Chhetri is a big factor," said Bilal, who also played at this venue for Muktiyoddha Sangsad against East Bengal.

It was not just the former footballers

cheering Bangladesh on. A few hundred football fans and some club officials also turned up wearing the Bangladesh jersey and waved the red and green flag.

"We caught the eye of some players and I think our presence will inspire them to play boldly," said Saif SC manager Obaidur Rahman, while the club's general secretary Mahbubur Rahman said that they came here to watch Bangladesh win.

Football Supporters Association of Bangladesh general secretary Hasan Mahmud believed that while the few hundred supporters would not be able to drown out the voice of Indian supporters, their supports for Bangladesh will definitely surprise the Indian team.

"We came here to back the national team because they have been playing good football in the last year and a half and we want to voice our wholehearted support," Hasan said, adding that some 500 to 600 supporters came to Kolkata to watch the match but not all were able to get tickets.

The 85,000 capacity stadium was almost packed with the locals backing their country vociferously in what was Kolkata's first international match in eight years.

"I watch club football regularly and watching a game involving the national team is something that I don't have words to describe," said Sourav Datta of Barakpur. "It is nice that Bangladesh are playing here because we have a good relationship with Bangladesh football. Bangladesh captain Mamunul Islam played here."

"We have come here to watch India win... we will win the match," said Chandan Majumder, also from Barakpur.



Infantino due after midnight

SPORTS REPORTER

FIFA president Gianni Infantino will arrive in Dhaka in the early hours of Thursday on a one-day goodwill visit.

The 49-year-old supremo of world football's governing body will be arriving from Mongolia at 1:50am, along with his entourage which includes four high officials.

The FIFA president will pay a courtesy call on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Prime Minister's Office on Thursday morning before meeting Bangladesh Football Federation members at the federation's headquarters.

Infantino will attend a press meet at the Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel in the afternoon before leaving Dhaka for Laos at 5:00pm.



Back to basics

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh opener Tamim Iqbal has been going through a rough patch since the start of the World Cup in England and after a self-imposed break, the left-hander returned to action in the just concluded first round of the National Cricket League (NCL). It was however not a happy outing as he failed to convert his starts in both innings (30 and 46), falling victim to the spin of Mahmudullah Riyad each time. It's no secret that when cricketers like Shakib Al Hasan and Tamim face difficulty, they invariably go to their favourite

mentors like Nazmul Abedin Fahim and Mohammad Salahuddin. Tamim, who preferred not to talk to the media, got an opportunity yesterday to spend some time in the nets with his beloved 'Salahuddin Sir'. Salahuddin however said that it was just a routine session with the star opener.

"I don't think there is anything wrong in his batting. It's a matter of time before he regains his rhythm. When you don't get the result after doing the hard work, there will be frustration. Tamim had worked really hard before the World Cup but unfortunately he didn't get the result," observed Salahuddin.

Squad to be named after 2nd round

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) are not hurrying into the decision of naming the squad for the upcoming tour of India, starting from November 3.

The ongoing 21st edition of the National Cricket League (NCL) has been seen as the perfect platform for players to prove their mettle in order to earn a place for the upcoming tour. However, even though there have been a few notable performances in the first round, it seems that the board will scrutinise a few more areas before making their final decision.

Left-handed opener Imrul Kayes's double-century for Khulna Division against Rangpur Division was the major highlight of the first round,

with other players like Kamrul Islam and Taijul Islam also putting in impressive performances.

However, BCB chief selector Minhajul Abedin informed that the board would announce the final squad after observing the performances of players in the second round starting tomorrow.

"We will observe for another round in NCL and then we will announce the squad for the India tour. Imrul scored a double century, but just one round [of NCL] has been played. We will know better about how players are performing after another round," Minhajul told reporters in Mirpur yesterday.

Bangladesh, who were humiliated by newcomers Afghanistan during their one-off Test last month, will

face a much tougher challenge from top-ranked India. And while there are myriad areas to improve in, the fitness of the fast bowlers is making the chief selector sweat most ahead of the Tigers' next challenge.

"We have been worried about the pace bowlers for the past six months. If we make a list of 10 pacers then we might find that five are suffering from injuries or are recovering," said Minhajul, who thought that the Bangladesh bowlers still do not have the fitness to scalp all 20 wickets in a Test against the likes of India.

Minhajul also informed that ace pacer Mustafizur Rahman, who could not play the first round of the NCL due to a slight ankle problem, cannot bowl more than 15 overs in the second round.

Undaunted for a century

ANISUR RAHMAN from Kolkata



The road heading north of Eden Gardens is a calm and quiet one, with some old

trees lining the sides of the narrow street near the famous stadium. The trees and the road are silent witnesses to the history of the Maidan's club para, which is quite different from Bangladesh's club para in Motijheel, and the fount of Kolkata's glorious footballing heritage stands at the end of the street in the form of the century-old East Bengal Football Club.

A rich trophy room on the left-hand side of the entrance greets visitors to the historic club. Hanging on the wall are iconic images of the club's successes since its establishment in 1920. The building also houses a hall of fame featuring some rare photographs.

The gymnasium, dressing room, referees' room, medical room and the steam and cooling berths for players is situated below the wrought-iron gallery, which was once made of wood. On the celebration stage at the centre of the two main gates leading to the arena a slogan proclaimed that 'the ball has been changed, but the fight for possession has not changed'. Another slogan proudly declares that 'in winning the century too, the red and yellow does not halt... East Bengal, East Bengal' (Shotabdi joye o theme thakena lal holuder dol, East Bengal, East Bengal).

East Bengal FC, however, are yet to win the prestigious I-League trophy and have remained trophy-less since the introduction of the Indian professional football league in 2007. The three-time National Football League (now-defunct) champions instead had to be content with four runners-up finishes.

"Nowadays, we don't see dedicated footballers who love the clubs. In days gone by a player had to be of high quality to sport the jersey of East Bengal or Mohun Bagan, but that is not the case now. They come to the club and leave after the match. Players like Krishanu Dey, Bikash Panji, Shishir Gosh and many other popular players once played for East Bengal

but the club doesn't have players of that standard anymore," said former East Bengal player and current youth level coach Sasthi Duley at the club tent yesterday.

The former Indian national midfielder, who was born and brought up in Hoogli, said: "Players are not coming from beyond Kolkata, like they did in the past. The standard of football has gone down, not just in Kolkata."

The 40-year-old said that the club is nursing three age-group teams to strengthen the pipeline, and also a coaching programme for school-going students, who get the opportunity to

You can see that whenever East Bengal and Mohun Bagan square off in any league or tournament," said Duley.

The high-ups at East Bengal are capitalising on the club's popularity as they are regularly getting investors and sponsors as well as donations from club members.

"The club is running well because of investors and sponsors. It is also selling merchandise in the form of T-shirts, jerseys, coffee mugs, bracelets and many other things," said East Bengal executive committee member Subrata Sarkar over the phone from Mumbai.

Subrata believes finishing among



train three days a week for a token fee. Duley also informed that the expenditure of the club has increased significantly for the players' transfers and that the club is now getting the benefit of the youth programmes as players are coming through. He added that they have signed up some eight to 10 players this season.

Despite falling standards, the hype surrounding the derby between East Bengal and Mohun Bagan has not gone down, evidenced by the craze of the teams' supporters during the Zee-Bangla Football League tournament final. The Abahani-Mohammedan rivalry in Bangladesh was comparable, but it has waned over the last decade with Mohammedan SC Ltd becoming weaker.

"The emotion of the supporters still remain; it has actually increased.

the top three in the I-League and a decent number of supporters are helping them to rope in sponsors, with many more in the pipeline eager to engage with the club.

East Bengal FC also has a good relationship with Bangladeshi organisers and players. Bangladesh's best defender, the late Monem Munna, Sheikh Mohammad Aslam, Rizvi Ahmed Rumi, Golam Gaus and many others had played for East Bengal and Munna's name is in the list of the foreign quota on the club's official website.

Subrata informed that they plan to invite Munna's family members for their centenary celebrations which will continue till July 2021 as they have already given a grand reception to all previous captains.