

# 'Aim is to avoid conceding early'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh are looking forward to not conceding early goals against Oman when they square off against the Middle Eastern nation in their away match of World Cup qualifiers at the Sultan Qaboos Sports Complex in Muscat tomorrow.

Oman are 100 places ahead of Bangladesh in FIFA Ranking and are set to take on Bangladesh for the first time, coming into the match on the back of a 2-1 defeat against group leaders Qatar. Oman are in second position in the group with six points from three matches while Bangladesh are at the bottom of the five-team table with a single point from three matches, thanks to a 1-1 draw against India in their last match.

"The match against Oman is definitely going to be very tough and the coach has already briefed the players regarding the team's approach. The bottom line is to avoid conceding early goals. If the boys can restrain Oman from scoring early, it will boost our players," manager Satyajit Das

Rupu said yesterday.

The charges of Jamie Day are looking to carry the momentum from the games against Qatar and India and are trying to make less mistakes than their first three matches. Goalkeeper Ashraful Islam Rana is confident about giving hundred percent effort in the match in a bid to snatch a point.

"We have to play against a strong Oman side, who will be playing in their own condition but we will try to concentrate hundred percent during the 90 minutes to get something out of this match," Rana said. "The coach is giving an idea about Oman by providing information regarding their strengths and weaknesses while also working on our weaknesses."

Forward Saad Uddin, who scored the only goal for Bangladesh in the campaign, wants to produce a positive result against Oman.

"We have already coped up with the condition in Oman and everyone is fit and in good shape. We hope to produce a positive result like the last match against India. The coach is working on his game plan and we are all ready to face Oman," said Saad.



Skipper Jamal Bhuiyan (L) and forward Saad Uddin lead the lines during a training session yesterday at the Sultan Qabul Sports Complex in Muscat, where Bangladesh will play their World Cup qualifying match against Oman tomorrow.

PHOTO: BFF

## 'BALOTELLI WILL BE CALLED UP ON MERIT'

Italy coach Roberto Mancini said on Monday he would not name Mario Balotelli in a national squad simply to make a statement against racism. "When I call Mario Balotelli it will be because he deserves it, not because of the colour of his skin," Mancini told a press conference before the Azzurri's final Euro 2020 qualifiers. "I know Mario and I love him. Remember, I got Mario to play when he was a boy, so I know him really well." Balotelli was the victim of racist abuse by Verona fans while playing for Brescia last weekend, and Italian football federation president Gabriele Gravina had suggested calling up the striker would send "an extraordinary message".

--AFP



## England drop Sterling

AFP, London

Raheem Sterling said he allowed his "emotions" to get the better of him leading to a brief altercation with Liverpool's Joe Gomez that resulted in Manchester City player being dropped for Thursday's Euro 2020 qualifier against Montenegro.

Sterling admitted on Instagram on Tuesday he and Gomez "had words" when they met up at the England camp the day after Liverpool's 3-1 win over defending champions Manchester City.

"Both Joe and I have had words and figured things out and moved on," Sterling said.

"We are in a sport where emotions run high and I am a man enough to admit when emotions got the better of me."

The Daily Mail reported that Gomez and Sterling had to be separated by teammates on Monday after a "physical confrontation."

# 5th round ends in stalemates

SPORTS REPORTER

With tropical cyclone Bulbul lashing the coastal areas of Bangladesh, all four fifth-round matches of the National Cricket League were affected and ended in draws on the fourth and final day yesterday.

In the Tier 2 match at the Sheikh Kamruzzaman Stadium in Rajshahi, skipper Marshall Ayub struck his 18th first-class ton for Dhaka Metropolis against Sylhet Division.

Dhaka Metro resumed the day on 245 for four with Marshall 27 runs shy of his hundred. He reached the feat off 169 balls and since then looked for quick runs before being dismissed on 163 off 212 balls with the help of 22 fours and a six.

Chasing the 356-run target in the last two sessions of the day, Sylhet eventually ended up on 187 for



MARSHALL AYUB...163



FARHAD REZA...6 for 48

four, riding on fifties from Shanaj Ahmed (61) and Towfiq Khan (75). Dhaka pacer Taskin Ahmed picked up three wickets for 24 runs.

Sylhet are still on top of the Tier 2 points table with 26.55 points in

five games while Dhaka are not far behind in second place with 21.91 points.

There was finally some cricket in the other Tier 2 game in Barishal after the first three days were abandoned due to rain and a wet outfield. Barishal declared their first innings on 70 for three in 13 overs, after which Chattogram ended the day on 45 without loss.

With 19.42 points Chattogram are in third place and Barishal are in last place with 17.62 points.

In Tier 1, Rajshahi's Forhad Reza picked up all six remaining of Khulna, who added just 47 runs on the final day to be all out for 201 in the first innings.

The 33-year-old ended up with the figures of six for 48 from 20.1 overs, registering his ninth five-wicket haul in first-class cricket.

In reply, Rajshahi struggled in their second innings and eventually ended up on 191 for seven at stumps, with opener Avishek Mitra top-scoring with 51. It was Khulna's experienced left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak who picked up four wickets, while pacer Abdul Halim also took

two wickets for the side.

With three draws and two wins, Khulna remained on top of the Tier 1 table with 29.96 points while Rajshahi are in third place with 17.11 points.

In Bogura, Nasir Hossain -- who resumed on 104 -- finished on an unbeaten 161 off 283 balls with 19 fours and a six as Rangpur declared their second innings on 271 for nine and set Dhaka Division a 284-run target just before lunch.

Resuming the day on 200 for five, Nasir Rangpur looked to score some quick runs. The 27-year-old Nasir continued his good form to help post a challenging target.

Chasing the tempting target, Dhaka were in a spot of bother and were struggling on 68 for three before Raqibul and Taibur added 77 runs for the fourth wicket. Taibur however was dismissed on 24 but Raqibul Hasan hit an unbeaten 80 off 173 balls, which featured five fours and two sixes.

With four draws and a win in five matches Dhaka are in second place with 24.1 points.

BANGAMATA ASIAN WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL CHAMPIONSHIP

## Hosts lose again to Nepal

SPORTS REPORTER

Hosts Bangladesh suffered their second straight defeat in the Bangamata Asian Senior Women's Central Zone International Volleyball Championship with a 3-0 sets defeat against Nepal at the Suhrawardi Indoor Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

The women in red and green failed to produce any resistance against the Nepalese girls and conceded 25-6, 25-7, 25-15 points defeat in the day's second match. Nepal, with three wins, moved into the final.

Despite losing the match, Bangladesh coach Golam Rasul Mehdi was happy with the performance of his charges.

"I am really happy with the performance because this group of girls are new in volleyball with no experience. Despite lack of international experience, they proved their worth and came to a level through this tournament," said Mehdi, who believes his team will play better in the upcoming South Asian Games in Nepal.

Bangladesh will play their fourth match today against Kyrgyzstan, who beat Afghanistan in straight sets in the day's first match.

## Saif SC reaping rewards of youth system

SPORTS REPORTER



With eight days remaining to the close of players' transfer window of Bangladesh Premier League, Saif Sporting Club on Wednesday completed their registration formalities by promoting 10 academy players to the senior squad.

Apart from their academy-nurtured players, the club retained the services of four national players -- midfielder Jamal Bhuiyan, defenders Rahmat Mia, Riyadul Hasan and Yeasin Arafat -- while signing up national team winger Arifur Rahman from Arambagh KS.

Out of the 10 young guns, five have already played for the Bangladesh under-19 team while Yeasin Arafat is playing for both the under-19 team and the senior team.

Saif SC is one of the two leading clubs who have been nursing youth squads over the last three years and have already started getting rewards from their youth academy, having significantly reduced expenditure of buying out players each season.

"In the last three years, we have been working with the young players relentlessly and now getting rewards from the academy. While other clubs are fighting to rope in players, we are banking on our own products. We have signed only two new players this season," Saif SC managing director Naisuruddin Chowdhury told The Daily Star.

"We have perhaps spent approximately Tk 3 crore to buy local players, which is Tk 1.5 crore less than the last season and Tk 3 crore less than our first season. I believe the expenditure will decrease further in the next season because more young players are in the pipeline," Chowdhury said, adding that they have been spending nearly Tk 1.2 crore for the youth team each year.

"If you compare our squad to the last season, our strength has increased by 40 percent because we now have five national players, who have been more or less playing in the starting eleven of the national team. We also have six players of the national under-19 team. The reserve-bench is also very strong," Chowdhury said, adding that they will need two players along with five national players and four foreign players -- Emery Bayisenge of Rwanda, Fayia Kobba of Sierra Leone, Jahongir Ergashev of Tajikistan and Dainer Andres Cordoba of Colombia -- to form the playing eleven.

Saif SC finished fourth in their first two seasons in top-flight football and they are now looking forward to doing better under the guidance of Maldivian coach Mohammad Nizam.

# Zverev outplays Nadal

AFP, London

Rafael Nadal refused to make excuses after being outplayed by defending champion Alexander Zverev at the ATP Finals on Monday as Stefanos Tsitsipas got his campaign off to a flying start.

The Spanish top seed, who has never won the season-ending event, came into the tournament at London's O2 Arena under an injury cloud and

was well short of his imperious best as he went down 6-2, 6-4.

In the earlier round-robin match in Group Andre Agassi, sixth seed Tsitsipas beat Daniil Medvedev 7-6 (7/5), 6-4, admitting their spiky relationship had made his job tougher.

Nadal is locked in a battle with Novak Djokovic to finish as the year-end number one but was not serving flat out in practice last week due to an abdominal strain that forced him to pull out of the Paris Masters at the

semifinal stage.

The 33-year-old led Germany's Zverev 5-0 in head-to-head contests coming into the match but was uncharacteristically sloppy in the first set, conceding two breaks of serve.

Buoyed by his dominant start, Zverev, seeded seventh, broke in the first game of the second set to take an iron grip on the match.

Nadal dug deep, urging himself on but his 22-year-old opponent proved too strong. He did not concede a single break point in the entire match.

## Rakitic to miss Euro qualifier

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona midfielder Ivan Rakitic has withdrawn from the Croatia squad due to an Achilles injury, his club confirmed on Tuesday.

Rakitic will miss Croatia's Euro 2020 qualifier against Slovakia on Saturday.

Croatia sit top of Group E but only two points clear of Hungary with one game left to play.

Rakitic will also be unavailable for Barca's charity match against Cartagena on Wednesday, along with Jordi Alba and Nelson Semedo, who are suffering from hamstring and calf problems respectively.

Gerard Pique, Ousmane Dembele and Sergi Roberto have been named in a youthful squad for the friendly, which will see ticket proceeds donated to victims of the floods around Cartagena in September.

The trophy for the ACC Emerging Teams Asia Cup 2019 was unveiled at a city hotel yesterday. The captains of each of the eight participating teams attended the ceremony for the tournament, which is set to begin on November 14 at different venues across the country.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



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