

SPORT



Mahbubur Rahman Sufil (R) celebrates scoring the only goal of the game to keep Bangladesh's slim hopes alive of making it to the finals of the South Asian Games. His strike in the 12th minute, a goal that saw Jamie Day's men secure their first victory in the tournament, handed Bangladesh a 1-0 win over Sri Lanka yesterday at the Dasarath Rangasala Stadium in Kathmandu.

PHOTO: BFF

Booters stay alive with win over SL

SPORTS REPORTER from Kathmandu

Bangladesh revived their chances of reaching the final of the men's football event of the 13th South Asian Games with a 1-0 victory against Sri Lanka in their third game at the Dasarath Rangasala in Kathmandu yesterday.

With Bhutan going to the top of the table with six points following their victory over Maldives earlier in the day and Nepal already on four points from two matches, Bangladesh desperately needed a win to stay in the race for the final.

The victory came courtesy of Mahbubur Rahman Sufil's 11th-minute goal -- a simple tap-in, set up by Saad Uddin following a through-ball from Jamal Bhuiyan, but the victory could have been by a much bigger margin had two substitute forwards not wasted three scoring chances towards the end.

Bangladesh coach Jamie Day had made four changes from the last game, with Nabib Newaz Jibon, Rahmat Mia, Biplob Ahmed and Mohammad Ibrahim replaced by Mahbubur Rahman Sufil, Bishwanath Ghosh, Mohammad Al-Amin and Yasin Khan in a 5-3-2 formation.

Despite the early goal, Bangladesh failed to take the game by the scruff of its neck, playing against a side that had played with less than 24 hours' recovery.

There weren't many attacking moves from either side in the rest of the first half before Rahmat Mia and Jibon came in place of Al Amin and Sufil, and things

started moving for Bangladesh in the attacking third.

Soon after coming on, Rahmat almost scored with a brilliant floating attempt on goal which Sri Lanka goalkeeper Sujun Perera just about kept from going in, tipping it over the bar.

Then Jibon had the chance to kill off the game when he timed his run perfectly on a brilliant through-ball, but he slowed his pace down looking for support when he should have buried it past the keeper.

Mohammad Ibrahim came in for Rabiul as Jamie Day fielded seven players who can all play in defence, but Bangladesh continued to create chances and the missed chances began to stack up, with Ibrahim missing two gilt-edged opportunities from the top of the box.

The wasted chances could come back to haunt Bangladesh in the final reckoning should it come down to goal-difference or head-to-head count, but the Bangladesh coach was relieved to finally get a win.

"I'm very pleased with the performance. I think we played brilliantly today. We should have killed the game (long before the end) which we couldn't do, but the end result is we got the victory," the coach said in his post-match reaction.

Bangladesh will face hosts Nepal in their last match on Sunday, and a win in that could see the Red and Greens through, depending on other results.

"We will have to [win that match]," the coach said. "The boys are tired, they are giving everything they can. They will have to dig in [against Nepal] and show their character."

In hospital instead of athletics track

ATIQUÉ ANAM from Kathmandu



Bangladesh's 400m sprint hope Zahir Raihan and fellow sprinter Abu Taleb failed to participate in the final of the event yesterday, owing to breathing problems and high pulse-rates due to the high altitude of Kathmandu, raising serious questions about the Bangladesh Olympic Association and Bangladesh Athletics Federation's preparation and planning regarding the 13th South Asian Games.

Zahir, Bangladesh's best in this discipline and one of the medal contenders, finished his heat in second position, third overall in the two heats, clocking 48.20 seconds at the Dasarath Rangasala which was much slower than his personal best.

However, during the last 100m metres of his heat, the 18-year-old looked completely out of breath, just managing to finish the race before falling down in a heap.

The same fate was endured by Taleb, who finished the heat in eighth position. Both were taken to the Blue Cross Hospital adjacent to the venue, where local doctors and Bangladeshi representatives said they were not in a condition to participate in the final, which was about an hour after the heats.

"They [Zahir and Taleb] have breathing problems. His [Zahir's] pulse rate is above 100, which is much higher than normal. It

happened due to the high altitude. We cannot release them right now," said Dr Pawan Rawal, a medical officer of the emergency section of Blue Cross Hospital.

Lying on the hospital bed across the street of the venue, Zahir was pleading with his coaches and officials to let him take part and not deprive the country of a probable medal. But the officials and coaches were helpless. Coach Abdullahel Kafi wiped away tears as he spoke to journalists.

"It is unfortunate that our athletes could not even make an attempt in the final. I was helpless," the coach said.

The problem of breathing due to high altitude was a direct result of the lack of conditioning time

for the Bangladesh athletes, who just arrived here on the night of December 1.

Most of the members of the Bangladesh contingent from across the disciplines have faced issues with breathing, but some have come ahead of time to acclimatise with the conditions. For example, the swimming team came to Kathmandu two weeks ahead of their schedule and rented a swimming pool to get used to swimming in 25-metre pools as opposed to the 50m ones they are used to swimming in back home.

Bangladesh's South Asian Games' training and development secretary AK Sarkar claimed that they asked all the federations whether they needed to send their

teams to Nepal ahead of time.

However, Bangladesh Athletics Federation's general secretary Abdur Rakib Montu, a day before the event, had said that they did not want to send the team ahead of time or send a big contingent as he felt they would disappoint anyway and it would create backlash.

Two Sri Lankan athletes later won the gold and silver medals in this discipline while the bronze was won by an Indian athlete.

Sri Lanka also grabbed gold in the women's 400m where Bangladesh's two participants, Sumi Akter finished seventh while Sabiha Al Soha failed to finish her sprint due to breathing problems.

The Sri Lankans, following disappointment in the 100m sprint, were beginning to sweep the gold medals in athletics along with the Indian athletes.

One of the Sri Lankan journalists informed that the condition here is difficult for their athletes too, but their athletes were better prepared as their federation arranged a conditioning camp at home, in a city much colder and higher than Colombo.

There were disappointing performances in hurdles and triple jump too on the second day of athletics.

Bangladesh won only two bronze medals in the last SA Games in India three years ago. This time Bangladesh have so far bagged a silver and a bronze medal and were hoping to add to that tally through Zahir yesterday.



Sprinter Zahir Raihan lying on the bed of Blue Cross Hospital in Nepal instead of competing in the final of the 400m event yesterday morning.

PHOTO: STAR

Two tons and six all out

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh women's cricket team, who already secured their place in the finals of the South Asian Games' T20 cricket competition, reinforced their hopes of winning a gold in the tournament with a thumping 249-run win over minnows Maldives at Pokhara, Nepal yesterday.

The matches are being considered as official T20 matches by the International Cricket Council (ICC) and Bangladesh's mammoth

win should give an idea of the intensity of the competition they faced against a Maldives side which had only played their first-ever T20 match three days ago.

Bangladesh secured wins over Sri Lanka and Nepal to cement their spot in the finals but surprisingly lost two top-order batsmen early yesterday after winning the toss. It all went downhill for Maldives from there on. Nigar Sultana and Fargana Hoque's highest T20I knocks so far had been 46 and 66 respectively. Averaging just over 16 with the bat, Nigar went on to become the first women from the country to

record a T20 century, narrowly besting Fargana to the milestone as Bangladesh, who regularly play this format, posted 255 for two over a side barely accustomed to playing cricket.

Nigar hit an unbeaten 65-ball 113, punctuated by 14 fours and three sixes, while Fargana Hoque, who also remained unbeaten, struck a 53-ball 110 laced with 20 fours. Maldives also gave away 20 extras, 10 of which came from wide deliveries.

After the exchange, Maldives were incredibly bowled out for just 6 runs and perhaps surprisingly their

innings lasted 11.5 overs. Seven of Maldives' batters went for a duck with the highest score coming from Shamma Ali, who scored two. Four of Maldives' players -- Latsha Haleemath, Sajaa Fatimath, Eashal Ibrahim and Shamma -- are yet to celebrate their 15th birthdays. Their number three batter, Sumayya Abdul, is just 11 years old while Hamza Niyaz is 15. Bangladesh ran riot with Ritu Moni and Salma Khatun picking up three wickets each.

Having won all three of their matches, Bangladesh will now play the final against either Sri Lanka or Nepal on December 8 at Pokhara.

BLOOMING IN THE DARK

Weekend WINDOW

ANISUR RAHMAN

Whether the story is of success or failure, mainstream sports like cricket, football, hockey and to a lesser extent shooting, swimming and other disciplines always hit the headlines. Meanwhile, self-defence sports like karate have generally failed to draw the attention of the country's media, despite regular domestic competitions and participation in international events.

There has recently been a blip in that trend as karate hit headlines following the remarkable success in the ongoing South Asian (SA) Games in Nepal, where the nation's karatekas grabbed three gold, three silver and 12 bronze medals, bringing glory for a sporting culture that has arguably not been in a good state.

Karate is a major part of the martial arts, which feature disciplines like judo, karate, taekwondo and wushu -- four indigenous self-defence disciplines that originated in Japan, South Korea and China. These sports have separate sets of rules and regulations. Martial arts are widely practised all over Bangladesh in a bid to learn techniques of self-defence but these disciplines are also sporting endeavours with Judo and Taekwondo being featured in the Olympic Games, while Karate and Wushu are played in the regional multi-sports extravaganzas under the Regional Olympic Committees.

All four formats are practised in Bangladesh under separate national federations but karate has made a special place in country's sports after its latest success in Nepal, which has come nine years after its biggest

triumph in the 11th edition of the SA Games held in Dhaka in 2010. The national karatekas grabbed four out of 18 gold in 2010. Since karate debuted in the regional multi-sports extravaganza in 1999 in Nepal, Bangladeshi karatekas have so far grabbed seven gold, nine silver and 30 bronze medals in five meets.

EARLY DAYS AND POPULARITY

Karate started its journey in Bangladesh in 1972 along with Judo under the banner of the Bangladesh Judo and Karate Federation before being separated in 2001, thanks to the initiative of the then president, and Lieutenant General (ret'd) Harun-Ar-Rashid. In the early days of Bangladesh's martial arts, judo received more attention because of its status as an Olympic sport. Martial arts also attracted the attention of people in Bangladesh following Hong Kong's kung fu based movie 'Chinese Boxer' (1970).

Later, many more such kung fu movies saw further increase in popularity and Bangla action movies starring actors Sohel Rana, Jahangir Alam, Masum Parvez Rubel and others took the interest in martial arts to new heights in Bangladesh. That interest still persists with scenes of martial arts classes being conducted in the early morning remaining a common site in different parks of districts across the country.

However, the progress of karate did not quite match the popularity as the first National Karate Championships were held in 1982, 10 years after its formal introduction to the country. National school karate championships were also held for a few editions. Since the introduction of the National Karate Championships in the early 80s, Japanese coaches under the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) project got involved and remained till the early 2000s.

"Karate is still not an Olympic

discipline because of its four different playing rules. Perhaps, it is a major reason behind the less attention and success," said M Abdul Quadir, former acting general secretary of the Judo and Karate Federation. "Besides, a conflict among the officials in 1979 was a huge blow for the discipline. Later, a new committee was formed in 1981 with the help of the then general secretary AKM Mosharrif Hossain, who paved the way to bring Japanese coaches through the JICA project in 1982 and the discipline got back on the right track."

Quadir also informed that JICA

taking over in 2014 till April, 2018 before the new committee, led by Bandarban Hill District Chairman and former karateka Kyaw Shwe Hla, took over from March 2018.

With karate not part of the Olympics and the Commonwealth Games, and with the biennial SA Games not held regularly, the discipline struggled to attract the athletes' attention through a couple of yearly domestic meets. Besides, the dark and damp environment at the National Sports Council's old gymnasium -- which is utilised by karate, taekwondo, judo and gymnastics -- is not the most



(L-R) Humaira Akter Antara, Al Amin Islam and Marzan Aktar Priya.

eventually stopped providing coaches and the progress of karate was halted before it started afresh in the late 2000s.

CURRENT STATE AND BARRIERS

Karate had been the top gold-hauling discipline in the 2010 SA Games but the game of karate got stuck afterwards with a new committee led by political leader-cum-organiser Ali Ahsan Badal

attractive venue for budding athletes to further their skills.

"At the moment, we have a good number of quality practitioners who are older and participating in the same weight category, but we need more new players to match other weight categories if we want to get more success at the international level," said Bangladesh Karate Federation vice-president and former karateka Moazzem Hossain

PHOTO: BOA

Sentu.

"Women karatekas have good potential in Bangladesh because they are intelligent but they drop out after marriage," said Japanese coach-cum-advisor Tetsuro Kitamura, who first coached Bangladesh from 1985 to 1987 and then from 2000 to 2004.

Pointing to the financial crisis, former karateka MA Quadir said that there is a lack of qualified coaches in karate that is a barrier to development.

POTENTIAL AND FUTURE ACTION

Disciplines like shooting and swimming had once been prime gold-hauling ones for Bangladesh in the regional multi-sport extravaganza, but both are at present in a poor state, yielding one or two gold medals in each edition.

All four gold medals Bangladesh grabbed in the ongoing SA Games till yesterday came from martial arts -- karate (three gold) and taekwondo (one gold) -- with athletes delivering gold medals in their SA Games debuts.

Nevertheless, martial arts disciplines, especially karate, can be a prime gold-hauler for Bangladesh in the future if proper attention and facilities are provided to karatekas, who can also bring glory from Asian Games -- the second-biggest multi-sports games after Olympics in terms of standards. Karateka Humaira Akter Antara took up karate just three years ago and stunned all to win a surprise gold medal in Nepal and it is evident that an athlete can be ready within a short period if he or she is given proper and effective training.

BKF general secretary Kyaw Shwe Hla informed that the success came because of good training, which they started a year ago -- six months before the start of official training for SA Games -- and sent the team to participate in international tournaments in Tajikistan, India, Cambodia before providing the

karatekas a 12 days of training and matches in Malaysia. He also added that they held the SA Karate Championship in Dhaka before heading to Nepal.

"We don't have our own venue where we can provide uninterrupted training to karatekas. So, it is our earnest request to the authority concerned to provide an independent place. I think it is important to have training on new mats before the Games, because we missed out on the gold medal in Nepal because our players slipped on a new mat and lost points," said Kyaw Shwe Hla.

Tetsuro Kitamura said: "To realise the dream, Bangladesh needs to have a long-term plan to groom athletes as well as bring changes in food habit, which Nepal has done. I believe athletes have to be sent abroad for international tournaments and training instead of having only domestic competitions. To get something big, you have to sacrifice some small things, because Bangladesh have good potential in karate."

"As team sports are gradually going to become expensive day by day, we should now emphasise on individual disciplines, especially for any Games because gold medals for a team sport and individual sport are equal," said MA Quadir. "You can see a lot of kids practising martial arts at the Dhanmondi Women's Sports Complex by paying and the respective federation should inspire their parents to continue it and bring them into the mainstream."

Quadir believed that if the NSC plays a good role to accommodate the dedicated organisers, irrespective of their political identity, in the executive committees of national federations, individual martial arts disciplines can be a good source of gold from future Games.

And finally, the media will have to play a good role to promote and make karate popular among the new generation by giving fair coverage to this successful discipline.