

'NOT A GOOD SIGN' INDEED

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"This is not a good sign." We want to believe incumbent Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president Nazmul Hassan said these words out of the frustration that stemmed from the fact that 'no one is willing to step up to challenge him for the presidency'.

Sadly, we can also say it is not a good sign that the country's most high-profile and affluent sports federation's election is going to take place today without any buzz at the boardroom of the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur.

There was some excitement over the last two elections in 2013 and 2017, when Hassan and former BCB president Saber Hossain Chowdhury became embroiled in a verbal battle, but this time it is apparently going to enter the history books as the most peaceful elections in cricket despite some discussion over a few categories.

Is it also a good sign that the BCB's Annual General Meeting (AGM), which was held after three years, had also failed to attract attention as stakeholders hardly raised any issues and refrained from debating financial or cricket development issues? The AGM is supposed to be the best

platform for the stakeholders to raise their voice but their timid demeanour indicated that the country's cricketing issues have all been resolved.

Why is the topic of forming regional cricket associations to develop the overall structure of the sport only raised when board elections are near? Would this question not be an appropriate one for the stakeholders to raise?

It was even more pathetic that the AGM news centered on the expensive gifts the stakeholders received.

Bangladesh cricket has achieved a lot during Hassan's tenure. He became the first elected president of the BCB in 2013, but nobody can deny that there are still problems aplenty surrounding the country's cricket, especially in relation to the proper structure of first-class cricket and the national team's desired improvement.

Then why has nobody shown any interest in challenging Hassan as he wanted? Why does it look so obvious that Hassan is going to serve the cricket for a third term when a total of 171 counsellors exercise their voting rights today?

Is it that there are no problems with Bangladesh cricket or that the problem lies elsewhere? The latter seems more probable.

We can remember here how questions were raised regarding lower-tier domestic

competitions in recent times. There were allegations ranging from biased umpiring, favouritism and muscle-flexing from powerful quarters during matches and even buying and selling of points.

Different media outlets ran a number of stories and many incidents became viral on social media and the cynics said that all those things happened only to ensure councillorship from the club quota as there are 12 director spots in category 2, to be elected by club representatives.

In the district and division category, there are 10 director posts and there is a serious question about the process of nominating the councillorship from different districts and divisions.

Overall, there seem to be reasons behind an unwillingness to tinker with the current processes of the BCB elections because of many 'puppet' councillors. We must search for an answer whether there is a level playing field or not. Because if not, the BCB elections will only be less meaningful and mundane in the coming days.

Nevertheless, echoing Hassan's sentiments, we also feel that it is not a good sign for the elections of the richest board of the country to go uncontested for the greater interest of the game.



Bangladesh football finds a new lease on life

ANISUR RAHMAN from Male



Bangladesh football looked dead and buried during a World Cup Qualifier in Doha against India in June, defending for 90 minutes before their resistance was broken by a late Sunil Chhetri brace.

But yesterday, nearly four months later, the same group of players turned things around in the SAFF Championship against the same opposition in Male, bravely holding their superior rivals to a 1-1 draw despite having found themselves one goal and one man short for the last 40 minutes.

The players may have remained the same, but Bangladesh's coach was different. Spanish coach Oscar Bruzon, who is in charge only for the SAFF Championship, has just transformed the team with a philosophy of positive football that is a far cry from former coach Jamie Day's counter-attacking strategy. That change in attitude has augured well for Jamal and Co.

"Playing style and mentality have been big factors under the two coaches. It could have been the same as the game in Doha [during the World Cup Qualifier] had we again played long balls. But yesterday we tried to keep possession and attack quickly," centre-back Tapu Barman told The Daily Star at the Henvieiru training ground during practice yesterday.

Goalkeeper Anisur Rahma Zico, who was bombarded by the Indian attack during the World Cup Qualifier in June, enjoyed a less stressful evening on Monday and also credited the Spaniard: "Oscar has been giving us a lot of confidence from the beginning and trying to make us understand that we can play

passing football with the quality we have. He also made us understand that Bangladesh is not a team that should stay at 189 in the FIFA Rankings. He has been asking us to prove our quality on the field and he would not mind even if we made mistakes. So, we are trying to play better football."

Echoing those sentiments, Saad Uddin said: "It is a difference of attitude. We now play positive possession football to win the match."

Striker Matin Mia also praised Oscar Bruzon for playing him in his preferred position.

"Oscar is motivating all of us continuously and trying to get the best out of each player. India are a good side but they never seemed that much better than us because our coach increased our confidence levels. That's why we could play good football against India," Matin said. "Yesterday was different because I played in my preferred position after playing many different positions for the national side. I just tried to play the way the coach instructed me and that's why I could play better a bit."

BFF president Kazi Salahuddin, who was in Maldives and watched the first two matches, said: "These boys weren't handled properly before and I think the best is yet to come. I believe they can play much better than yesterday [Monday]."

Explaining Bruzon's appointment, the BFF premier said: "It was a decision Bangladesh required at the time. That was the only decision I had. I didn't have any other options but to appoint Bruzon, who knows every player of the national team," Salahuddin added, opining that Bangladesh would still need victories in their next two games against Maldives and Nepal to reach the final.



Italy, Spain kick off Nations League Final Four

AFP, Milan



Italy and Spain will again face off in a semifinal on Wednesday when they take to the field at the San Siro for the Nations League Final Four opener, a replay of their epic Euro 2020 semi-final.

Spain finished on the losing side back in July's European Championship semifinal as the Azzurri prevailed on penalties and went on to win the tournament, beginning an unforgettable summer of sport for Italy.

Roberto Mancini's Italy are on a world-record run of 37 matches without defeat and have a squad predictably stuffed full of players who took part in their run to glory in the Euro final over England at Wembley.

"We'll be facing a great Italy team: they deservedly beat England in the final of the Euro and they've kept their long unbeaten run going," said Spain coach Luis Enrique after announcing his squad on Thursday. "But like our psychologist says, defeat comes to every team. And that means that they're closer to



in place of Italy's usual starting centre-forward Ciro Immobile and Atalanta's Rafael Toloi and Matteo Pessina.

Luis Enrique has too had injury problems with club matches coming thick and fast between last month's international break and the Final Four.

Teenage sensation Pedri will not take part after getting injured for the second time in less than a month, missing out on similarly young squad to the one which surpassed expectations at the Euro.

Tottenham's Bryan Gil has also been brought in after Marcos Llorente picked up a thigh injury during Atletico Madrid's 2-0 win over Barca at the weekend, while the Catalan giants' 17-year-old midfielder Gavi has been picked despite only having four La Liga appearances to his name.

Former Barca coach Enrique was lauded by the Italians after he heaped praise on them despite what must have been a painful defeat at Wembley, and he continued his charm offensive ahead of what promises to be a worthy opener to the Final Four. "We could have beaten them but we didn't manage to do it, we're two teams with a similar philosophy and we hope to take part in another exciting match," he said.



losing, that time is getting nearer." Mancini admitted that "Spain were the team we struggled against most during Euro 2020". "They are a good team with good players. It will be a good match," he told uefa.com.

The only different face from the Euro crowd was supposed to be in-form Roma midfielder Lorenzo Pellegrini, who on Sunday scored his sixth goal of the season in all competitions.

However injuries in the run-up to and during the weekend's Serie A fixtures mean Juventus striker Moise Kean, AC Milan defender Davide Calabria and Inter Milan youngster Federico Dimarco have all been drafted in at the last minute.

The trio have respectively come on board

No more sleepless nights for Yeasin

ANISUR RAHMAN from Male



Ahead of the start of the match against India in the SAFF Championship, Yeasin Arafat was distracted for a second as he recalled an incident in the final of the 2019 SAFF U-18 Championship against their Indian counterpart in Kathmandu when Bangladesh's left-back had been sent off for a second booking after covering his face with his jersey in celebration after cancelling out a second-minute lead from Vikram Partap Singh.

Bangladesh U-18, reduced to nine men, lost that final in gut-wrenching fashion, conceding in stoppage time in a 1-2 defeat and ending as runners-up in the maiden U-18 championship in September, 2019.

Yeasin burst into tears in the dressing room and endured sleepless nights. It would not be until another September day two years down the line that Yeasin would exact a measure of vengeance and banish



those demons.

Yeasin found the back of the net with a perfect header in the 74th minute to earn a valuable point against India in a SAFF Championship game on Monday, a feat made all the more impressive by the fact that the men in red and green had been reduced to 10 men for the game's last 40 minutes.

"When Bishwanath Bhai was sent off, the incident from the SAFF U-18 championship flashed in my mind. I was thinking whether we could do well after going a man short but I had faith in the Almighty and we drew against India with my strike," beamed Yeasin, whose strike was his maiden strike for the senior side although he has scored against India, Jordan and Bhutan in age-level competitions.

"When I started against India, I recalled the incident and I had revenge on my mind. Right now, we have no regrets about losing that final," said Yeasin, who captained that U-18 team.

He also slept soundly yesterday. Explaining the thinking behind their

set-piece strategy, the 19-year-old defender explained: "When we were analysing and planning for India's set-pieces before the match, we saw that they stayed compact in the box but their far post was vulnerable. So all our players moved to the near post to deceive them and I stood at the far post and nodded home."

"You need luck to get goals in the national team but you always have to be prepared to take opportunities because you don't know when the chance will come," Yeasin, who has also scored two goals for Saif SC in the Bangladesh Premier League, said, adding that he did not feel any pressure to stop Sunil Chhetri.

Yeasin was groomed in Narayanganj under the guidance of local coach Aslam before being selected for the Sylhet Football Academy. He then played the Pioneer Football League for Arambagh before joining Bangladesh Premier League side Saif SC in 2017. Over the past three years, he has played more than 50 matches for Saif SC. He made his national debut against Bhutan in a friendly in 2019, coming on as a substitute.

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