



In a year that offered little to no positive news on any front, with even the country's premier sport cricket offering only agony, Bangladesh Under-19 women's football team provided everyone with something to cheer as they ended the year by retaining the SAFF U-19 Women's Championship title. Thanks to a late goal from Anai Mogini, the hosts beat India 1-0 in the final at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday. Bangladesh dominated throughout the tournament, scoring 20 goals and conceding none.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED



GIRLS LIFT NATION'S SPIRIT

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh did not disappoint the 15,000 present at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday defeating India 1-0 in the final of the SAFF U-19 Women's Championship, offering them a joyous occasion at the end of a year that offered very little hope to the people of the nation.

After such a dominant display, Bangladesh coach Golam Rabbani Choton excitedly expressed confidence that the gap between his side and India and Nepal at the senior level is shrinking.

While talking to reporters following his side's 1-0 win over India in the final of the SAFF U-19 Women's Championship, the long-serving coach of Bangladesh women's football team said that they are taking success gradually to higher age-group levels.

"You see we started with wins in



under-14 and under-15 level. Last time we won the under-18 title and now the under-19 title. So it is a matter of four or five years before we compete with India and Nepal at senior level," Choton said in his post-match reaction.

Bangladesh had bossed women's age-group football for the last five years but each time the senior sides turned up at the SAFF Championship, they failed to match India and Nepal. The veteran coach believes that times are changing.

"You see, the last title we won in 2018 was an under-18 one. This time, playing at the under-19, we were even better. We were the best side in the tournament and played much better than in group stages when we had beaten India 1-0," Choton added.

The coach's words and his conviction were echoed by his victorious charges, who completely dominated the final, giving little footing to the Indian team.

Anai Mogini, who made the difference eventually after a couple of

their attempts came off the woodwork, said she was eyeing the goal with her trademark shot from distance.

"I had scored similar goals before. So I tried it, once it hit the post but the second time it went in. I'm extremely happy to have contributed towards the victory. Everyone back at our homes and everywhere in the country will be proud tonight," the right-back said.

Mogini got the goal with a clever looping shot on a cheeky backpass from Shaheda Akter Ripa. The right-winger Ripa was not a number one choice in that position but her hat-trick in the previous match against Sri Lanka prompted the coach to start her ahead of Marzia.

Ripa not only paid back the coach's faith but also grabbed the top-scorer award with five goals as well as the trophy for the most valuable player.

"The secret to success was teamwork. The coaches and everyone else played their part in the victory. We are all happy to have earned this victory in the month of victory," said the girl from Cox's Bazar.

Nayeem spins East to unlikely win

Hridoy hits double century in draw

SPORTS REPORTER

Off-spinner Nayeem Hasan scripted a dramatic turnaround on the fourth and final day of the second round of the Bangladesh Cricket League, leading Islami Bank East Zone to a magnificent ten-run win over Walton Central Zone at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

From Central Zone's perspective, it was a horrible batting collapse. They were cruising at 145 for 1 in chase of 199 before losing nine wickets for the addition of just 43 runs, folding for 189 as Nayeem scalped six in the innings.

Nayeem, who registered his eleventh five-wicket haul in first-class cricket, ended up picking eight wickets in the two innings as East Zone sealed their first win in the four-day competition.

The off-spinner, who also scored 68 runs with the bat, provided the first breakthrough for East Zone on the second hour of the fourth day, breaking the 120-run second-wicket stand between Mohammad Mithun and Soumya Sarkar, dismissing the latter for 73.

Mithun soon followed, becoming Nayeem's third wicket of the innings, after scoring 60 and Central Zone lost their way afterwards. Aside from Nayeem's six-wicket haul, left-arm spinner Tanvir Islam bagged three wickets for East Zone.

It was an interesting encounter right from the first day as East Zone took a first-innings lead of 18 runs after posting 245. Central Zone came back strong and managed to leave East Zone reeling on 51 for 6 before Nayeem and Pritom Hasan scored fifties and added a crucial 103-run stand for the seventh wicket, but they could only post 180 in their second innings.

In the other match, Towhid Hridoy converted his maiden first-class ton into a double hundred for BCB South Zone against BCB North Zone as the game eventually ended in a draw at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chattogram yesterday.

South Zone resumed the day on 350 for 3 with Hridoy on 159. The right-hander picked up where he left off to register a double ton before being dismissed after scoring 217 off 387 deliveries, a knock that featured sixteen fours and four sixes.

South Zone eventually took the first-innings lead and were bowled out for 499.

In reply, North Zone scored 62 for one before stumps were drawn, meaning South Zone remain top of the table with a win and a draw from two games.

Earlier, North Zone posted 385 in their first innings courtesy of Naem Islam's 28th first-class ton and left-arm spinner Nasum Ahmed registered his 100th first-class wicket after bagging six wickets for South Zone.



Undeniable South Korea claim maiden triumph

SPORTS REPORTER

South Korea were crowned champions of the Asian Champions Trophy after beating Japan 4-2 in a dramatic shootout in the final at the Maulna Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

South Korea, trailing 1-1 with only six minutes left, showed an undeniable spirit to make a 3-2 in the 55th minute before forcing a shootout by levelling the margin with only one second left, thanks to two superb penalty-corner goals from Jang Jonghyun, also the hero of Korea's semifinal triumph against Pakistan.

However, on this occasion he had to share the spotlight with goalkeeper Kim Jaehyeon, who emerged in the shootout to deny two Japanese players and give South Korea their first Asian Champions Trophy title in their maiden final appearance.

Meanwhile, Japan had to be content with a second-placed finish for the second time after a 3-1 loss to Pakistan in the third edition of the Asian Champions Trophy in 2013.

In the match, Japan -- who stormed into the final with 5-3 upset against India -- clearly dominated despite conceding in the eight-minute, looking unstoppable with their pace and solid defending.

After failing to cash in on two penalty-corners in the first half, Japan equalised by capitalising on their third penalty-corner in the second quarter and took the lead with a fourth penalty-corner conversion. Japan then scored again in the third quarter to make it 3-1 and almost snatch the game away.



Their goalkeeper Yoshikawa Takashi ensured the lead would not narrow, stopping six successive penalty-corners between the second and fourth quarter.

However, Korea did not lose hope, claiming five further penalty-corners in the fourth quarter and Jang Jonghyun, who finished as the tournament's top-scorer with 10 goals, converted one in the 55th minute to reduce arrears before winning a penalty-corner review with seven seconds on the clock. South Korea then sensationally equalised with only one second to go.

Japan's Kenta Tanaka and Bangladesh's

Biplob Khujur were adjudged 'best promising player' and 'goalkeeper of the tournament' respectively.

In the day's first match, India inflicted a 4-3 defeat on arch-rivals Pakistan to claim third place. An exciting place-deciding match saw Pakistan surrender the lead in the last quarter of the game, meaning they have now failed to beat India for 13 straight matches.

It was a battle for prestige between the cross-border rivals after their exit from the semifinals meant that this edition would be the first in tournament history that neither India nor Pakistan would be in the final.