



Bangladesh goalkeeper Anisur Rahman Zico catches the ball confidently – a scene replayed over and over again over the course of the match – in a 2-0 defeat against Bahrain in the opening Asian Cup Qualifying fixture at the Bukit Jalil National Stadium in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

PHOTO: AFC

## Consistency key for Mueller

AGENCIES

Thomas Mueller says Germany must be more consistent and score wins over the top nations if they are to be considered among the favourites for the looming World Cup finals.

A Harry Kane penalty two minutes from time at Munich's Allianz Arena saw England snatch a 1-1 draw with Germany on Tuesday in their Nations League clash.

It was Kane's 50th goal for his country and he is now three goals behind England's all-time top scorer Wayne Rooney.

Germany dominated for long periods and took the lead through Jonas Hofmann until defender Nico Schlotterbeck conceded a late penalty by fouling Kane.



The Germans are unbeaten in all 11 games under head coach Hansi Flick, but could only draw with England, Italy and the Netherlands in their last three games.

"It's a bitter note that we're again not getting the three points," Mueller moaned in Munich.

"The performance level was high, but consistency and results are part of being a top team. Now we have to confirm that and not just keep hinting at it."

The 32-year-old had a few chances in front of England's goal on his 114th international appearance and saw improvements from last Saturday 1-1 draw against the Italians in Bologna.

"It was a completely different feeling compared to Italy. You've seen what we're capable of," he added.

After two games in Group A3, Germany sit third in the table and are two points behind leaders Italy.

Germany face a tricky away tie against second-placed Hungary this Saturday in Budapest, where England suffered a shock 1-0 defeat last weekend.

The Germans then host Italy in Moenchengladbach next Tuesday.

# Cabrera pleased despite defeat

SPORTS REPORTER

A string of fine saves from goalkeeper Anisur Rahman Zico could not rescue Bangladesh in the Asian Cup Qualifiers as the men in red and green suffered a 2-0 defeat to Bahrain in the Group E opener at the Bukit Jalil National Stadium in Kuala Lumpur yesterday.

Bahrain took a 2-0 goal lead in the first half with two brilliant strikes from Ali Abdula Haram and Komail Hasan Alaswad but failed to extend the margin after the break against the 188th-ranked Bangladesh, who had lost by the same margin against the same side in their only previous meeting – during the President's Cup in Seoul, South Korea in 1979.

Ahead of the match, the concern for Bangladesh fans was not regarding the result, instead on how big the margin of defeat would be against a side who are 99 places ahead of them in FIFA rankings. But in the end, the satisfying part for Javier Cabrera's side was perhaps keeping the margin of defeat to a respectable level while not letting Bahrain run amok in the second half.

Much of the credit for keeping the scoreline to the respectable level should be attributed to goalkeeper Zico, who

made at least 10 decent saves in two halves following his superb performance against Indonesia last week in the buildup to the qualifiers.

Cabrera picked the same starting eleven that played out a goalless draw against Indonesia in Bandung on June 1, and the booters paid back the faith of the Spanish coach by keeping Bahrain at bay for the first half-an-hour of the match. The defenders played with good discipline while the forwards ventured into the opposition territory during this time, with captain Jamal Bhuiyan narrowly missing the target from a free-kick.

However, Ali Abdullah Haram broke Bangladesh's resistance in the 34th minute with a brilliant glancing header off a Komail Hasan corner after Zico had thwarted five attempts from the opposition players.

Three minutes before the break, Komail drove a powerful grounder to double the lead for Bahrain as the higher ranked side went to the break with a deserved two-goal lead. However, Bangladesh, while not conceding any further, had some sporadic moves in the Bahrain area but failed to cause any damage.

Cabrera termed the performance of his

charges as a competitive one.

"I think we had a very competitive performance, but obviously we're not happy with the result at the end which is a defeat. I am very proud with the performance and effort of the boys," the Spanish coach said at the post-match conference.

Explaining his game plan, the 37-year-old coach said, "We had plans in terms of block and distances between us and creating spaces upfront. However, it has been a good performance in a way."

Even though Bangladesh adopted a counter-attack based approach, they played a lot of miss-passes and lost the ball all too easily too many times in the midfield in the first half. The coach was happy that things improved in the second half.

"We did not give them many chances in the first half and in the second half we had quite some initiatives with the balls. During the break, we spoke that we have to step up which happened in the second half and we were able to change things in second half," said Cabrera.

Bangladesh will play their second match on June 11, who were surprisingly beaten 3-1 by hosts Malaysia in the second match of the group later in the day.

## India legend Mithali Raj calls time on career

REUTERS, New Delhi

India women team captain Mithali Raj quit international cricket on Wednesday after a 23-year career during which she established herself as the country's greatest female batter.

"Like all journey, this one too must come to an end," the 39-year-old said in a statement on social media. "Today is the day I retire from all forms of international cricket."

Raj made her India debut as a 16-year-old in a 1996 one-day against Ireland and scored 68 against South Africa in a Women's World Cup match in Christchurch in March in what proved to be her last international outing.

Her tally of 7805 runs, which include seven hundreds, from 232 matches makes her the leading scorer in women's ODIs.

She also played 12 Test matches scoring 699 runs which include a career best 214 against England at Taunton in 2002.

"... the last 23 years have been the most fulfilling, challenging & enjoyable years of my life," said Raj, who led India to the World Cup finals in 2005 and 2017.

"I feel now is the perfect time to call curtains on my playing career as the team is in the capable hands of some very talented young players and the future of Indian cricket is bright."

Raj has been the face of women's cricket in India and her performance has inspired a biopic which will be released next month.



## Pant-led India take on South Africa today

REUTERS, New Delhi

Wicketkeeper Rishabh Pant will lead India in the home Twenty20 series against South Africa after KL Rahul was ruled out with a groin injury on Wednesday.

Top order batter Rahul had been put in charge after India decided to rest several frontline players, including regular captain Rohit Sharma and stalwart Virat Kohli, at the end of the Indian Premier League (IPL) last month.

Left-arm wrist-spinner Kuldeep Yadav will also miss the five-match series after sustaining a hand injury while batting in the nets ahead of Thursday's series opener in New Delhi, the Indian cricket board said in a statement.

All-rounder Hardik Pandya, who led Gujarat Titans to a memorable IPL victory in their debut season, will be Pant's deputy.

The home side have not named any replacements for the injured two.

# Lefty batters' stern test in the Caribbean

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

The last time Bangladesh played a Test series in West Indies, Kumar Roach hobbled away to a fiver, conceding just eight runs in Antigua, the venue for Bangladesh's upcoming Test against the Windies this time around as well. In 2018, Bangladesh fell to their lowest Test score of 43 during that tour and Roach, Jason Holder and Shannnon Gabriel ran riot.

Raw pace, extra bounce and the brand-new duke ball undid the Tigers in that first innings. Tamim Iqbal got one that just moved away slightly and got the edge. Mominul Haque then pushed at a fuller length one and was caught at gully. Skipper Shakib Al Hasan's stay lasted just one delivery as he failed to get his bat out of Roach's line just outside the off-stump. The common denominators in all three dismissals? Roach, right-arm pace from around the wicket, bowling to a left-handed batter.

Bangladesh top-order is full of left handers with Tamim, Nazmul Hossain Shanto, Mominul and Shakib in there. Since 2019, Tamim has gotten out to right-arm pace from around the wicket thrice in 12 innings. Mominul has been done by that line of delivery six times in 20 innings, same as Shanto who took only 12 innings while skipper Shakib had



gotten out twice in four innings during the same period.

When a right-arm pacer goes around the wicket to a left-hander, the bowler increases the chances of getting one of three probable ways in which to bag a wicket. Bowled, leg before or the nick through to wicket-keeper or slip cordon are all in play. But before anyone looks at the Bangladesh batting order's lefties with disdain, the overall picture is of right-arm pacers holding sway over left-hand batters in Tests for quite a while now.

From 2001 till 2014, left-handers had averaged 36.38, compared to 26.91 managed by right-handed batters while batting against right-arm pacers. Since 2015 till present, the average of lefties against right-arm quicks is 27.83. What changed? Right-arm pacers bowling from around the wicket. In the last five years, 40 percent deliveries from right-arm pacers have come from around the wicket compared to 21 percent in the previous decade.

Coming back to Roach, the pacer has

the highest number of wickets in Antigua, bagging 43 in eight matches. Holder, Gabriel and Alzarri Joseph make up the top four in a ground where the first Test was held in 2008.

Meanwhile Jayden Seales, who has 13 Tests under his belt, has also looked sharp in recent Tests for the Windies and looking like he might be a regular face in the Windies Test squad.

Forget the others, even medium pacer Kyle Mayers wreaked havoc in Windies in the last Test his side played at home, picking up five wickets against England which sealed the series for the hosts. Given the Windies pace attack's height and guile at bowling good line, it should be a scary prospect for Bangladesh top-order and especially left-handers. All these Windies pacers have one thing in common, they are all right-arm pacers.

Bangladesh, meanwhile, will be missing the services of Taskin Ahmed and Shoriful Islam in the Tests and will be hoping that Mustafizur Rahman, Ebadot Hossain and Khaled Ahmed can leave a mark.

"There is no alternative to winning and we want to win. But performances in Tests have been a concern. Our top-order didn't click and concern remains on how we played against Sri Lanka at Dhaka Test," team director Khaled Mahmud told the media yesterday.

"The boys have a lot of ability, Shanto is still new but has two hundreds. Mominul has the highest number of Test centuries among batters in Bangladesh and Tamim has a lot of experience in this format. In top-order, apart from [Mahmudul Hasan] Joy, we have experienced players so hopefully if the boys return to form, we are a good side," Mahmud added but going by the trend of right-arm pace against left-arm batters, the task is set to be difficult in Windies Tests.

SIR VIVIAN RICHARDS STADIUM			
BD 1st Inn			
Total:	43	Overs:	18.4
		Extras:	
		R HOSSAIN	6
Boundary	18th over		
P'ship	0		0