

Indonesia in FIFA talks over Israel protests

AFP, Jakarta

Indonesian President Joko Widodo said Tuesday he was sending the country's football association chief for talks with FIFA about its hosting of the Under-20 World Cup after the draw was nixed following protests over Israel's participation.

The two countries do not have formal diplomatic relations, and support for the Palestinian cause in the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation runs high, fueling local opposition to hosting the Israeli team.

"I have sent (Indonesian Football Association) PSSI chief Erick Thohir to meet with FIFA team to look for the best solution," Widodo said in a livestreamed speech.

He did not specify when Thohir would fly to FIFA headquarter in Switzerland or which FIFA officials he would meet.

Fixtures for the 24-nation tournament beginning in May were due to be chosen on Friday in Bali, but FIFA cancelled the event without reason or setting a new date.



Unlike the rest of his team members, Bangladesh Test and T20I skipper Shakib Al Hasan had a busy schedule in Chattogram yesterday. While the Tigers' T20I squad enjoyed a rest day on Tuesday, Shakib appeared for a commercial shooting at the port city's CRB area. After winning the first game by 22 runs, Bangladesh are scheduled to play the second of their three-match T20I series against Ireland at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium today.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

'Russian participation works'

REUTERS, Lausanne

International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach on Tuesday defended plans to get Russian and Belarusian athletes back into competitions as neutrals, saying their participation "works" despite the ongoing war in Ukraine.

The IOC sanctioned Russia and Belarus after the February 2022 invasion but is now eager to see athletes come back across all sports and have a chance to qualify for the Paris 2024 Olympics.

It has set out a pathway for these competitors to earn Olympic slots through Asian qualifying and left it up to international federations to decide on organisation, but has faced headwinds, with Ukraine threatening to boycott the Paris Games should they compete there, even as neutrals.

"Participation of athletes with Russian and Belarusian passports in international competitions works," Bach said.

"We see this almost every day in a number of sports, most prominently in tennis but also in cycling, in some table tennis competitions."

Russians and Belarusians have been competing as neutrals in some sports. Their presence at some events, such as tennis tournaments, has triggered angry reactions from some other athletes.

Bach said politics could not be a part of sports competitions and athletes should not be punished for their passports.

'Mahmud's body mechanics similar to Shoaib Akhtar'

SPORTS REPORTER

As Bangladesh look to seal the three-match T20I series against Ireland when they meet for the second game in Chattogram today, a lot of focus will once again be on the Tigers' growing pace-bowling unit.

There has been a burgeoning belief in and about the Tigers' pace-bowling unit in recent times and it was Taskin Ahmed who stood tall in the first T20I, registering career-best figures of four for 16 to restrict Ireland to 81 for five in chase of a revised 104-run target from eight overs (DLS method).

Another young seamer, Hasan Mahmud, continued to impress with his skills. With his ability to bowl quick, the cricketer from Laxmipur has emerged as the go-to for the Tigers in the white-ball formats, adding variety to the pace battery.

The 23-year-old has matured immensely since making his T20I debut three years ago and appears to welcome the challenge of putting himself in pressure situations.

That much was evident in the first T20I when Irish openers Paul Stirling and Ross Adair came out with an attacking mindset and amassed 32 runs in the first two overs. Skipper Shakib Al Hasan then handed the ball to Mahmud and the seamer managed to absorb the pressure before conjuring a well-directed yorker that bowled Adair to rock the visitors and bring Bangladesh back into the game.

Local pace-bowling coach Mahbub Ali Zaki worked with Mahmud during his age-level days and informed that the youngster had always been among a rare breed of seamers.



"I have seen him right from the under-16 days and we immediately marked him as a rare find for our pace-bowling department. He has got the same elements as Taskin, who has strong wrist position. Why we termed him rare is because of the hyper-extension in terms of his body mechanics. It is pretty similar to Shoaib Akhtar. Mahmud has a snap wrist, which

helps him get sharper cuts into the batter and makes him more lethal as a pacer," Zaki told The Daily Star yesterday.

He has also shown vast improvement under the guidance of Bangladesh's pace-bowling coach Allan Donald, but according to Zaki there are still a lot of areas that Mahmud needs to work on, chief among them fitness.

"I think he still needs to work a lot on his fitness since he is an injury-prone pacer like Taskin. But Mahmud's body is not similar to Taskin's. He is more of a Mustafizur Rahman, who requires a different level of fitness. He is more of a hip-dominant bowler so it is important for Mahmud to continuously do strength training. I am sure he is following that under the national staff," he said.

The lack of venom in the Tigers' pace-bowling unit in the past has hurt Bangladesh badly. However, the current lot of pacers have started to create the culture of healthy competition within the team and that has started to reap rewards.

It will be crucial for someone like Mahmud to keep improving and, according to Zaki, the international cricketer requires something extra that must be worked on continuously.

"Look, we can see how capable our bowlers are, but we cannot be complacent. Taskin can be a great example. Despite having all the talent, he has seen the lowest of lows in his career. But not everyone is lucky enough to make a comeback like Taskin. For Mahmud, these are still early days and the more he plays and takes care of himself, the better he will be in the coming days," Zaki added.

Russia clinch SAFF U-17 Women's title

SPORTS REPORTER

Russia clinched the title of the SAFF U-17 Women's Championship with a hundred per cent record following a 2-0 win over India in the final match of round robin format at the Birshreshtha Shaheed Mostafa Kamal Stadium in Kamalapur yesterday.

Russia, who are suspended from playing in UEFA and FIFA-sanctioned events since the country's invasion of Ukraine last year, were invited by the SAFF as guest participants in the five-team championship. And the European nation cruised to the title with 12 points from four games, following the win over India last night.

Bangladesh, meanwhile, finished runners-up with seven points after being held to a 1-1 draw by Nepal in their last match earlier yesterday.

The hosts got on the backfoot early, conceding an 8th-minute lead, with Senu Pariyar finishing a solo move with a fantastic finish. The girls in red and green, though, scored a well-deserved equaliser in the 75th minute of the game, Sagorika turning home Trishna Rani's cross from in front of goal.

India, despite the defeat, finished third with six points while Nepal finished fourth with four points. Bhutan ended the championship without collecting a single point.



Anamul shines for Abahani

SPORTS REPORTER

Anamul Haque Bijoy, who has recently lost his place in the national side, continued his good form in the domestic circuit as his blistering unbeaten fifty propelled Abahani to a thumping 10-wicket victory over Rupganj Tigers Cricket Club in their Dhaka Premier League encounter at the Khan Shaheb Osman Ali Stadium in Fatullah yesterday.

After bundling out Rupganj for a meagre 127 for 10 in 37.2 overs, Anamul smashed an unbeaten 63-ball 80, laced with seven boundaries and five maximums, while Mohammad Naim played second fiddle with an unbeaten 52-ball 43 to see Abahani cruise to victory with 30.5 overs to spare.

With 312 runs in five matches at 104 average, Anamul remains the third-highest scorer in DPL so far. Naim, who has also been out of the national side, is the top scorer in the tournament, with 355 runs in five games.

Meanwhile, at the BKSP-4 Ground, City Club registered their first victory of the tournament, beating Dhaka Leopards by six wickets. Fifties from Shahriar Komol and Rayan Rafsan saw City chase down the 163-run target with 30 balls to spare.

Brothers Union also tasted victory for the first time in the tournament. Chasing a 287-run target, Anisul Islam hit a 114-ball 107, featuring eight boundaries and five maximums, while Sabbir Hossen scored a 69-ball 62 as Brothers got over the line with just a ball in hand.

'No difference' between hosts' pros and Seychelles' amateurs

SPORTS REPORTER from Sylhet

The amateur footballers of Seychelles attempted to cheer up their Bangladesh counterparts, clapping and chanting 'come on men' while the dejected hosts walked to the podium after suffering a 1-0 defeat to the visitors in the second of two friendlies between the sides at the Sylhet District Stadium yesterday.

England-based defender Michael Ian Mancienne had struck the decisive goal from the penalty spot in the 61st minute after defender Saad Uddin fouled Daryle Bertrand inside the box.

Although Bangladesh won the prior friendly last week by an identical 1-0 margin, the defeat in the second game was a momentous occasion for Seychelles, whose squad largely consists of part-time footballers that have full-time careers off the field.

Visiting coach Neville Both, who is a full-time PE teacher, was ecstatic with the result and afterwards rubbished the notion that Bangladesh's footballers were better.

"There was no difference between the two sides. Even if they are professional footballers, I didn't see any difference. The only thing was that they were playing at home, so we wanted to sit back and let them circulate the ball. As soon as they arrived in dangerous areas, they lost possession. So,

no big difference."

Meanwhile, Bangladesh were left to rue their indiscipline, having also lost after conceding such penalties in the SAFF Championship and four-nation tournament in Sri Lanka.

"It seems like a joke that we lost to Seychelles," captain Jamal Bhuiyan said



after the match. "We wanted to win but we conceded a stupid penalty again. We are repeating history by giving away stupid penalties. And we did it again. That's why they won the match."

Bangladesh coach Javier Cabrera drafted Robiul Hasan and Suman Reza in place of Jamal Bhuiyan and Aminur Rahman Sajib respectively, but the 192nd-ranked hosts failed to live up to the billing against a 199th-ranked opponent that featured only two full-time footballers.

"The coach chose some new players for this match and I think they could not implement the game plan in the first half. But we dominated in the second half and created chances," said Jamal, who came off the bench in the second half.

Cabrera's charges look purposeless and could hardly threaten Seychelles, who opted to press and negate Bangladesh's build-up. Seychelles could not even create a half-chance before scoring the decisive goal.

"It was a huge fight because they are very, very physical and strong team," Cabrera said. "I saw important improvements from a tactical point of view and in terms of identity and ideas."

"To me the game was better than the first game. They performed well in every single department: defence, attack and transition. But we were not able to show consistency in terms of the result," the 37-year-old, who was unhappy with the overall performance, added.

"I am not happy because I believe we could have done better than what we did in both matches. We deserved to win both games and two wins would have boosted the boys," Cabrera said.

After going behind, Bangladesh sent on forwards Eleta Kingsley and Matin Mia but could not equalise despite getting a couple of chances.



Argentina captain Lionel Messi stares at the life-size statue of himself holding a replica of the World Cup trophy, unveiled at the South American Football Federation (CONMEBOL) headquarters in Luque, Paraguay on Monday. Messi was honoured by CONMEBOL for his achievement and his statue will stand alongside those of his predecessor, Diego Maradona, and Brazil great Pele at the South American federation's museum.

PHOTO: AFP