

## ‘We buried dreams of our children’

REUTERS, Jakarta

Indonesian players and fans were dismayed on Thursday after the country was dropped as host of the Under-20 soccer World Cup following outrage among politicians in the predominantly Muslim nation about Israel's participation.

FIFA made the call after Indonesia's football federation (PSSI) said it had cancelled the draw for the tournament because the governor of Bali refused to host Israel's team.

One Indonesian national team player blamed politicians.

"We sacrificed our time, thoughts, sweat and even blood. But it suddenly failed due to your political reasons," striker Rabbani Tasnim Siddiq said on Instagram.

Another player, Hokky Caraka, said he had lost the chance to fulfil a "life goal to make my parents proud, scoring goals in the U-20 World Cup".

The stripping of the hosting rights also means Indonesia loses its automatic berth in the tournament.

"We have buried the dreams of our own children," coach Nova Arianto said.

## Neymar goes ‘from a million to zero’

AGENCIES

Neymar could not get rid of his misfortunes even off the pitch as the Paris Saint Germain forward's Twitter account was hacked and he suffered a big loss while playing poker.

The Brazilian forward is out for the season due to his ankle surgery in March, and is using some of his free time to indulge in his passion for poker.

Neymar often tries his luck in online games on his Twitch platform. In doing so on this occasion, he threw away a staggering amount of money. Not that the Brazil international seemed to care.

According to reports from Brazilian outlet Globo Esporte, he lost 1 million in just an hour, causing him to fake cry and scream while a mock Titanic theme played in the background.

In a couple of seconds we saw a range of mock emotions as his crying turned into laughter.

One of his fellow players commented that he went "from a million to zero in 60 minutes", and Neymar responded by jokingly saying he would put it on YouTube.

Neymar also saw his Twitter account hacked on the same night he suffered the big loss. Among the messages was a directed profanity towards a Brazilian news outlet, which is uncharacteristic of the usually calm and collected footballer.



“When my pattern of play is aggressive, I would also want my partner to play the same way. It makes things easier for both of us. You wouldn’t know how [easily] runs are being scored when batting with Liton [Das]”

Rony Talukdar on Thursday credited his fellow Bangladesh opener Liton Das' aggressive approach for the Tigers' recent success at the top of the order in T20Is.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Tigers look to maintain intensity in final T20I

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh captain Shakib Al Hasan had already given the cue that there may be changes in the line-up for the third and final T20I against Ireland, but what he would not want to see change is the hunger and drive from his players. If that intensity is carried forward, more records may tumble in the third T20I today.

It has been evident that the Tigers have had the mental edge against Ireland this series, having successfully shown aggression in all three departments. The Irish were the only side to beat England in the T20I World Cup last year, so a lack of intensity will allow the visitors to gain a foothold ahead of the away series in England in May.

"If we go to Australia or England and they are 2-0 up, they will look to go 3-0. We will not be complacent. Maybe we'll try new guys, but they will be just as hungry to score runs or get wickets," Shakib had said after the series-clinching second T20I.

The Tigers are undergoing a purple patch in T20Is, which includes a historic 3-0 whitewash of England in their previous series, and Shakib would not like to see that slip in the final T20I.

The pace attack has been tremendous in the last few series and only a bit of tinkering might be possible. It may be likely that Shoriful Islam gets into the side considering the need to manage Taskin Ahmed's workload.

The bigger question is whether the Tigers will play leg-spinner Rishad Hossain to reinvigorate the outlook of the side for the future.

When it comes to leg spin, Bangladesh have been afraid for a while. In domestic games, leg-spinners are not the attacking options that they are usually intended to be. Without performances to back him up, Rishad will have to make way as well. But from the team's perspective, a leg-spinner playing without fear is the priority.

The opening slots have been promising in the recent two series. Rony Talukdar has been able to reciprocate the management's faith by showing that he can come out and attack during the Powerplay. Like Rony, others have been given the licence to play without the fear of being dropped.

"We play to the plan which the team management gives us.



The basic plan is to stay positive and show that intent. The team management is trying to emphasise one thing in the dressing room and that is being able to play fearless cricket. That's our main task," Rony said yesterday.

The openers have been able to find a similar groove in their approach this series and open possibilities with lofty Powerplay ambitions. For Rony, their aggression was not founded on swinging their bats at anything that comes their way.

"We talk a lot and try to play according to the merit of the ball and focus on playing proper cricketing shots. If you can rotate the strike with positive intent, there is more chance that the innings will be big," he said.

The batting order has found more flexibility as well. Shakib promoted himself up the order in the last match and such changes could be the norm.

"We make our plans match by match. The plans aren't made for how to play series against England or series against Ireland. If we could go in a similar vein, it will work for us in the future. As a team, the team management wants to boost the idea of playing aggressively," he said about the constant urge to go forward.

## Alfaz laments lack of spirit

SPORTS REPORTER

Except for suspended Sri Lanka, all subcontinent nations grabbed the opportunity to play international friendlies in the FIFA window in March to assess their performances ahead of the upcoming SAFF Championship, slated for June 23 to July 3 in India.

Bangladesh, India, Nepal, and Bhutan had played a maximum of two matches apiece. 106-ranked India predictably registered wins against two strong sides in Myanmar and Kyrgyzstan while Nepal defeated Laos before being held by Bhutan. Elsewhere, Maldives beat Pakistan in the two side's only match in the FIFA window.

Meanwhile, hosts Bangladesh beat Seychelles first up 1-0 before a dismal performance allowed the visitors to bounce back with a victory by an identical margin in Sylhet.

The defeat to Seychelles had triggered scrutiny towards the Bangladesh booters. Their latest performance remained subpar despite having prepared for nearly two weeks in Saudi Arabia, where they played two practice matches, before facing the East African nation, comprising a majority of amateur players who can only afford to focus on the sport on weekends.

Bangladesh legend Alfaz Ahmed lamented the approach of the players for having lacked "mentality" and "commitment", and the former



national striker specifically criticised the tactics of head coach Javier Cabrera.

"I will blame everyone, including the coach, for the defeat in the second match but we have to accept the defeat because such upset happens in football," said Alfaz, who is also the head coach of Mohammedan Sporting Club.

Alfaz was baffled by the defensive formation from the onset and he thinks the subsequent substitutions were odd enough for Cabrera to be "held accountable" for game plan.

"What did he [Cabrera] want to execute in the second match? The coach should be asked why he sent Jamal Bhuiyan in the second half after choosing two defensive midfielders in the starting eleven.

"I think the team went on the back foot after Robitul was substituted by Jamal. Two wings also did not work effectively despite sending Mohammedan Ibrahim, who was instrumental in the couple of previous matches by scoring goals.

"Before playing the second match, the players got an idea about the opponents. They should play attacking football on the back of the first match win but they played with two defensive midfielders, leaving Suman Reza as the lone forward in th attacking third," opined Alfaz.

He remains unwilling to bank on Cabrera's charges to go the distance at the upcoming regional extravaganza. "Seychelles may be ahead of Bangladesh in terms of physicality, but ... if we put such a poor display on the back of good preparation, then we don't see any hope for this team. There was no spirit among the boys," said Alfaz, adding if Bangladesh can grow as a team in remaining weeks, there could be a possibility to go beyond the group stage of the SAFF Championship.



Skippers of nine Indian Premier League (IPL) outfits, barring Mumbai Indians captain Rohit Sharma, pose with the trophy in Ahmedabad on Thursday ahead of the highly anticipated 16th edition of the money-spinning league. Rohit's absence, however, has sparked some hilarious banter between Mumbai Indians and their rival fans on social media.

PHOTO: BCCI

## Back to familiar format, IPL begins today

REUTERS, Bengaluru

Gujarat Titans begin the defence of their Indian Premier League (IPL) title against four-times champions Chennai Super Kings on Friday as the Twenty20 tournament returns to its traditional home-and-away format after a gap of four years.

The 2020 edition of the money-spinning league and the second half of the 2021 tournament took place in the United Arab Emirates as India battled the COVID-19 pandemic.

Last year's expanded 10-team event was held mostly in Mumbai and Pune. This time the IPL is also set to see three Bangladesh players feature -- Shakib Al Hasan and Liton Das for Kolkata Knight Riders and Mustafizur Rahman for Delhi Capitals. This is the highest participation in the money-spinning from Bangladesh. However, Liton and Shakib might miss a few games for KKR as the duo are yet to be released by the cricket board of Bangladesh, who are scheduled to play a one-off Test against Ireland from April 4.

Ahmedabad side Gujarat, one of the two expansion teams along with Lucknow, capped a fairytale debut season by defeating inaugural champions Rajasthan Royals in front of around 100,000 fans in the final at home.

Hardik Pandya's side are the bookmakers' favourites to retain the

trophy but five-times champions Mumbai Indians -- the most successful IPL outfit -- and Chennai will aim to reclaim the crown in the 16th edition of the event.

Home support could play a major role and Chennai's fans served up a reminder of what teams have missed with a thunderous round of applause for Mahendra Singh Dhoni during a recent practice session amid media speculation it could be his last IPL.

While a return to familiar settings will be a welcome boost for teams, they will need to quickly master the new rule that adds another strategic dimension to the game.

For the first time IPL sides will be allowed to make a tactical substitution with an "Impact Player" coming in to bat or bowl as needed.

Delhi Capitals head coach Ricky Ponting said the move would also negate the need for all-rounders.

With one eye on that tournament, India captain Rohit Sharma has suggested his national team players should consider skipping some IPL games to manage their workload.

Top Indian players Rishabh Pant (Delhi), Jasprit Bumrah (Mumbai) and Shreyas Iyer (Kolkata Knight Riders) are missing the IPL this year due to injury, while England batsman Jonny Bairstow (Punjab) is still recovering from surgery.