

Rakib thanks 'unbelievable' fans

SPORTS REPORTER

As Bangladesh defeated Maldives 3-2 on aggregate to secure their spot in the World Cup Qualifiers for the third successive time yesterday, the men in red and green seemed to be celebrating endlessly.

Forward Rakib Hossain and Faisal Ahmed Fahim, two Bangladesh scores on the evening, removed their jerseys to hold the national flags, as well as the Palestine flag. The players went on to celebrate with respective coaching staff, and they were tossed in the air one by one to celebrate the victory – one that was termed as “the final of the year”.

“It was a tactical game. We played in line with our plan, and they played in line with theirs,” Rakib remarked after the game.

“We had some chances after taking the lead, but I also missed a few. However, we were determined not to upset our home crowd. We strived to offer our all in every position.”

“If you work hard, you will achieve your goals. We've been working incredibly hard together for a long time. We had no stars on the team but we played as a unit.

“We had a belief that we could do something better together, especially after playing out a draw in Male,” said the forward, who gave Bangladesh a lead in the 11th minute.

Rakib also thanked the home crowd for making the Bashundhara Kings Arena a full house.



Faisal Ahmed Fahim lets out a loud cheer as his teammates chase him following his decisive goal in a 2-1 victory against Maldives in the World Cup prequalifiers at the Bashundhara Kings Arena yesterday. (L) Players celebrate their victory with the national flag as well as that of Palestine. PHOTO: BFF



“Eleven of us fought on the ground, while supporters backed us up beyond it. Six months ago, attendance was poor due to our inability to generate results, but we produced some good results during the SAFF Championship, as well as in matches against Cambodia and Afghanistan.

“So, they are coming to watch our games, and we did not want to disappoint the fans, who were unbelievable today with the way they cheered for us throughout the match,” Rakib added.

Bangladesh clinch WC Qualifiers spot

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Shrugging off late pressure, 10-man Bangladesh defeated Maldives 2-1 in the second leg of the preliminary round to move into the World Cup Qualifiers with a 3-2 aggregate win at the Bashundhara Kings Arena yesterday.

Forwards Rakib Hossain and Faisal Ahmed Fahim scored one goal apiece either side of Maldives' equaliser from Aisam Ibrahim to ensure a place in Group I, which also features Australia, Palestine and Lebanon.

The win ensures six home-and-away matches in the group stage of qualifiers for the men in red and green, with their

first match against Australia scheduled for November 16 in Melbourne.

Bangladesh came into the match on the back of a 1-1 draw in Male last week, knowing that a defeat would force them out of competitive international football for one year. Javier Cabrera's charges did not disappoint the 7000-strong crowd at the Kings Arena where they had previously played out two draws against Afghanistan last month.

Maldives started brilliantly and controlled the game for the first 10 minutes before Bangladesh took control of the match and broke the deadlock against the run of the play in the 11th minute.

Saad Uddin, who replaced Isa Faisal in the starting eleven, released a powerful through-pass that seemed headed for the touchline but Fahim ran superbly down the left flank to cut it back for Rakib, who calmly placed home to send the crowd in rapture.

The men in red and green created three more chances but Rakib and Fahim were denied by goalkeeper Hussain Shareef before the former rattled the crossbar.

Mitul Marma made a brilliant save at the other end to thwart a powerful shot from Hamza Mohamed but the young goalkeeper was helpless in the 36th minute as Aisam headed home when

a corner from Hamza came his way following a deflection from Fahim.

Fahim, however, made amends and restored Bangladesh's lead in the first minute of the second half with a powerful drive from inside the box after Saad whipped in a cross from the left side.

Bangladesh received a huge blow on the hour-mark when Mohammad Sohel Rana received a second yellow card following a needless foul on an opposition player inside the opposition half.

However, Bangladesh showed tremendous character in the 30-odd remaining minutes and left the ground with a memorable victory over the island nation.



Cristiano Ronaldo struck twice as Roberto Martinez's relentless Portugal thrashed Bosnia and Herzegovina 5-0 on Monday in Euro 2024 qualifying. Ronaldo netted his 126th and 127th Portugal goals, further extending his record as the top all-time men's international goalscorer. Manchester United's Bruno Fernandes added the third before Barcelona duo Joao Cancelo and Joao Felix joined in the fun, all before half-time. PHOTO: AFP

Infantino 'shocked' by Brussels attack

AFP, Paris

FIFA president Gianni Infantino said on Tuesday that he was “shocked” and “saddened” by the shooting dead of two Swedish nationals before the Euro qualifying match between Belgium and Sweden.

“I am deeply shocked and saddened by the tragic death of two Swedish nationals in Brussels close to the stadium where Belgium were hosting Sweden in a UEFA EURO 2024 qualifying match,” Infantino wrote on Instagram.

The suspected attacker, a radicalised Tunisian national living illegally in Belgium, was killed by police on Tuesday.

Todibo apologises for 'nervous laugh'

AFP, Lille

France international Jean-Clair Todibo on Monday apologised for laughing during a minute's silence in memory of the victims of the Israel-Hamas conflict and a murdered French teacher before a Euro 2024 qualifier last week.

“I had a nervous laugh in relation to this minute of silence but in no case did I make fun of the current situation,” the 23-year-old Nice defender told journalists.

Cameras caught Todibo laughing during the tribute, which took place before France's 2-1 win over the Netherlands in Amsterdam on Friday, to the victims of the conflict between Hamas and Israel.

The minute's silence also remembered a teacher killed last week in the northern French city of Arras in what the government called an Islamist terror attack.

Todibo said he had never intended to offend.

“I wanted to express myself today in relation to the extent of the situation and the interpretation of the situation which is quite crazy,” he said before France's press conference in Lille.

“The context was unusual, we were among rival fans who had made certain jokes and I had this nervous laugh that came out.

“I wanted to apologise to all the people who I could have offended, that's the least I can do. Let there be no mistake about that.”

“I'm hurt because it taints the education that my mother gave me,” he continued.

Before Todibo's apology, the national ethics council of the French Football Federation had sent a letter to the player to ask him to explain himself, reserving the right to refer the matter to the FFF disciplinary committee.



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