

Green gallery turning grey

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI from Sylhet

The Sylhet International Cricket Stadium (SICS) is the only stadium in Bangladesh to house a green gallery, lying westward from the media centre, making it one of the most picturesque international grounds in the world.

However, the dream of a lush green gallery, which inspired its inception, is vanishing quickly. Bangladesh Cricket Board's (BCB) is responsible for it going to ruins, but the circumstances have played just as big a part.

When the green gallery was built by carving a small hill for it to be level with the stands, it added to the aura of the still-scenic venue. Yet, the lushness that it once bore, reminding of Sylhet's essence with its tea gardens and hills, now stands like an abrupt dwelling, not matching the green of the field of play.

Perhaps it was built to resemble the grass banks of venues in South Africa or New Zealand – where spectators also enjoy the luxury of watching matches in leisurely fashion – but the soil itself is not such that a green gallery would serve its function.

Tea gardens are hot and dry places because tea plantations

absorb water heavily. The soil in the hills turns red, especially in October and March. The rainy season results in the formation of green grass but, without rain water, it is not effective as filtering water through the ground results in water coming down.

One aspect of the soil getting rougher and having less of a green tinge of grass compared to the grass on the cricket field is down to two different soil types in place.

Inside the field of play, the lush green comes from the dubra grass

➔ The red soil of the tea garden hills makes it difficult to grow grass consistently, resulting in barren spots seen now.

➔ The ground staff attempted to plant the grass used on the playing field, but it did not work as expected.

➔ The current goal is to create hospitality boxes that will be carved into the green gallery. BCB believes it is a less complicated process than washing soil down.



being used, often brought from India. When the very same grass was used on the hill of the green gallery, it was found that during rainy seasons the grass erodes away with the water coming down the hill.

Strangely enough, the flag stand area of the green gallery is still lush. It is to do with the shape and proportion of the flag stand area compared to the entire green gallery at SICS. In that part of the gallery, despite having similar soil, the grassy patch rolls down

smoothly to the base. It has meant that the size of it is problematic for maintenance and thus functional.

"If you look at international galleries, they are very smooth. We don't have the equipment or the skilled manpower here to slice away the hills to make it less jagged. Those who work with shaving away these hills don't have that expertise," Forhad Quraishi, Sylhet's divisional sports administration's executive member and Sylhet's media manager, informed The Daily Star.

"We can only give the plan but

making it into what we want it to be is something we haven't wrapped our heads around yet," he added.

Previously, some two thousand fans were allowed into the stand during matches. There is a restriction now, though. It is a matter of security given the height and despite soil being hard, BCB do not want to take a chance of the soil collapsing when too many people are at one part of the green gallery.

"We don't let the green gallery get filled, it's always 1500 to 1800 people that are allowed and sometimes a thousand," a BCB official informed.

Yesterday, during Sylhet Strikers' match against Fortune Barishal, the gallery flooded more than usual, a security risk that BCB officials say they are aware of.

Even as BCB has provided plans for the hill being cut into the shape needed, the National Sports Council does not have the equipment or expertise either as it is not available in the country.

More often, when something is working, even if not hundred percent, it is allowed to continue. As long as the cricket is not affected, the green gallery's plight too is rendered just about functional. Fans still love to flock there, but it has lost its aura.

Abahani, MSC in Fed Cup quarters

SPORTS REPORTER

Record 12-time champions Abahani and defending champions Mohammedan secured their quarterfinal spots in the Federation Cup with victories in their Group B matches on Monday.

Mohammedan edged Brothers Union 2-1 in Gopalganj, to sit in second position behind Abahani on goal difference, both having six points each from two matches.

Sourav Dewan broke the deadlock for Mohammedan in the 66th minute with a deflected shot following a cutback from Soleymane Diabate.

Valijonov Otobek equalised for Brother union three minutes later with a tremendous freekick but Jafar Iqbal ensured Mohammedan left the pitch with a victory with a powerful header on 85 minutes.

Meanwhile, Abahani cruised to a 3-0 victory against Chittagong Abahani at the Bashundhara Kings Arena. Brazilian midfielder Bruninho opened the scoring in the 43rd minute. The lead was doubled two minutes into the second half through a toe-poke from Emeka Ogburn before Washington Brandao wrapped up the victory with a left-footed strike in the 83rd minute.

'GRADUALLY IMPROVING' Shakib vital for Rangpur

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh all rounder Shakib Al Hasan did not bat and conceded 41 in his quota of four overs but his side Rangpur Riders still emerged victorious against holders Comilla Victorians by eight runs in a Bangladesh Premier League (BPL) fixture yesterday.

Apart from Shakib, the day's opening match featured a number of star cricketers – such as former Pakistan captain Babar Azam, Mohammad Rizwan, Bangladesh batter Liton Das – but Afghan all-rounder Azmatullah Omarzai stood out at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium, having quickfired a 20-ball 36, helping Rangpur reach 165 for five, before returning figures of 2-31.

Although Shakib helped stifle the scoring rate in the Powerplay, giving away 11 runs in two overs, he went for an uncharacteristic beating in his and the match's final over.

Comilla could only manage 20 of the required 29 runs in that over after Shakib picked up his solitary scalp of the match in the second delivery, leaving Comilla needing a near-impossible 27 off the last four balls.

Rangpur skipper Nurul Hasan Sohan said that Shakib's presence is vital for them, irrespective of his overall fitness.

"He may face problems in batting due to his eye problem but his presence in the field is more important for us," said Sohan in the post-match presser.

Sylhet Strikers playing an unfit Mashrafe Bin Mortaza had already drawn criticism, and many believe that it only highlighted the BPL's subpar standard.

And Shakib's participation with problematic eyes also adds to the notion that the franchise owners are more interested in big names rather than fully fit players.

Sohan, however, hoped that they would get a fully fit Shakib in the later part of the tournament. "He is trying and even on off-day he is not missing his training. His eye condition is also gradually improving."



Bangladesh batter Mahmudullah Riyad made his presence felt with the bat, smashing an unbeaten 51 off just 24 deliveries to help Fortune Barishal beat Sylhet Strikers by 49 runs in their Bangladesh Premier League encounter at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium yesterday. Meanwhile, Rangpur Riders' Shakib Al Hasan, reduced to play as a specialist bowler due to eyesight issues, cut a disappointing figure as he conceded plenty during his side's eight-run victory against Comilla Victorians in the day game yesterday.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

SHORT CORNER

U19s begin Super Six with must-win Nepal encounter

Bangladesh begin their Super Sixes phase of the ICC U-19 World Cup with an encounter against Nepal at the Manguang Oval in Bloemfontein today. With India and Pakistan winning their Super Sixes yesterday, the equation is simple for Bangladesh as the 2020 champions must prepare to win all two of their Super Sixes matches to keep their semifinals berth alive.

Argentina to play Nigeria, Ivory Coast in March

The current world champions Argentina will play against Nigeria and Ivory Coast in their next friendlies in China in March. The two friendlies will be the last before Lionel Messi and company gear up for the Copa America, to be held in the United States in June.

Messi's Miami beaten in pre-season goal-fest

Luis Suarez bagged his maiden goal for Inter Miami and Lionel Messi scored a penalty but it was not enough to stop the Major League Soccer side falling to a 4-3 defeat against Saudi Pro League side Al Hilal in Riyadh on Monday. The game was the latest leg of Miami's globe-trotting pre-season tour ahead of the start of the MLS season on February 21.

Palestine's historic Asian Cup run ends

Hosts and holders Qatar fought back to defeat Palestine 2-1 and reach the Asian Cup quarter-finals on Monday. Palestine were playing in the knockout rounds for the first time and, against the backdrop of the Israel-Hamas war in the Palestinian territory of Gaza, took a surprise first-half lead.

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Forward Christian Kouame and defender Serge Aurier were ecstatic as Franck Kessie scored the decisive spot-kick to knock out holders Senegal from the Africa Cup of Nations following a 5-4 win on penalties on Monday. Seemingly dead, buried and completely humiliated just a few days ago as they were on the brink of exiting from the group stage, Ivory Coast's stunning win over a tournament favourite has injected a sense of optimism as they move into the quarterfinals and are eyeing a third continental title.

PHOTO: AFP

Chance for Liverpool to consolidate top spot

AGENCIES

Liverpool go into the clash against Chelsea today with hopes of maintaining their momentum at the Premier League summit but exiting Reds coach Jurgen Klopp will be worried not to put a foot wrong and leave rivals Manchester City breathing down their neck in the title race.

Klopp, who recently shocked everyone by announcing his decision to step down at the end of the season, will be desperate to cap his reign with a second league title, and Liverpool enter Matchday 22 five points clear of second-placed Manchester City, albeit having played a game more.

Klopp's men have extended their unbeaten run in all competitions to 10 games.

Boasting a 22-game unbeaten league run at Anfield, Liverpool have every right to feel optimistic, but success is not a given as there has been nothing to separate the Reds



If Liverpool win today, Jurgen Klopp will reach a double century of league wins faster than any other manager in the club's history.

Liverpool have scored in 30 of their last 31 Premier League fixtures since the goalless draw against Chelsea at Stamford Bridge last April.

Liverpool have won 10 and drawn one of the 11 league games this season when they have scored the first goal.

and Chelsea in recent years.

Indeed, each of the last seven meetings between the two clubs have ended as draws, including four 0-0 stalemates in 90 minutes – this run of consecutive draws is the longest between two top flight teams in English football history.

On the other hand, while Chelsea deserve the plaudits that come their way for putting together a 10 game

unbeaten run at Stamford Bridge, there is little to be desired about their recent away form as they head to Anfield having lost five of their last six games on the road in all competitions, conceding at least twice on five of those occasions.

Ninth on the points table, Chelsea, however, can take heart from the fact that they have only lost two of their last 11 visits to Anfield.