



Nov 13, 2023

VISION 2047

T A R G E T 2 0 2 6



**"TOUGHER THE RIVALS,
STRONGER WE ARE"**

- Kalyan Chaubey
President, AIFF

**"UNITED WE
STAND TALL"**

- Sunil Chhetri
Captain, India



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President's Note

The more we play, the better we play

Kalyan Chaubey

Fourteen matches in the gap of seven months. India perhaps have never played so many games during a year, and I can say in no uncertain terms that the team as a whole, have been great beneficiaries of it.

We started with the Tri-Nation Cup in Manipur, and then followed that up with the Intercontinental Cup, and the SAFF Championship, all tournaments where the Blue Tigers brought great joy to the fans of Indian Football. It was not only about winning those matches, but also about the way we won them, and the opponents we defeated on the way.

It is always our intention for our national team to play the best available opponents, and with that intention, we had requested the South Asian Football Federation to invite teams like Lebanon and Kuwait to the SAFF Championship, something that not only increased its value, but its competitiveness also. Such hard-fought matches will only go on to help our boys prepare better for the bigger challenges that lie ahead of us in the World Cup Qualifiers in November and the AFC Asian Cup in January.

The two upcoming World Cup Qualifiers, away in Kuwait, and then at home against Qatar will be extremely crucial for our challenge for the future. Our boys have shown amply well that they can not only fight, but also hold their own against a physically imposing side like Kuwait. Qatar, on the other hand, are of a higher quality, but Sunil Chhetri and the boys can very well draw inspiration from their last two performances against them. We have, in recent years, earned a point against the reigning Asian champions, and narrowly lost 0-1 in the other game in the last World Cup Qualifiers (both matches being played in Qatar).



As a former footballer myself, I can say that it has not been a mere jump to a certain level. Rather, it was a process that the team began with the victories against the Kyrgyz Republic and Myanmar in Imphal, and just kept building from there to the SAFF Championship victory in Bengaluru, where they beat a strong side like Kuwait. No shortcuts, and relentless hard work.

That is the same approach with which we have planned to bring about the overall development of Indian Football, through our strategic plan Vision 2047. The launch of the Blue Cubs League earlier this year will be crucial to the development of football in the longer term, and I am happy to say that such efforts on our part have now been recognised by the Asian Football Confederation, who have conferred the bronze medal at the AFC Presidents Recognition Awards for Grassroots in Doha on October 31, beating opponents like Brunei, Syria, and even Iran in the same category.



We do not intend to stop here. We want to, over time, get the gold medal as well.

While our form at home was one to boast of, our last three matches away have ended in disappointment. But the situation is not one of despair. Anyone who saw our two matches in the King's Cup and the Merdeka Tournament would have seen the heart that our boys showed on the pitch against strong opponents, as they also battled the 12th man on the pitch in Thailand and Malaysia. The result at the Merdeka Tournament was perhaps the hardest pill to swallow for us, as we were so near, yet so far. It is a historic tournament where our teams have done well in the past, and we perhaps could have done well in October as well, had we had the rub of the green. However, the experience gained from such matches remains invaluable to the boys.

Our most recent success at an administrative level directly aims to give our players more experience of playing in adverse conditions that are very different to the ones we experience at home. We have recently signed an MoU with the Central Asian Football Association (CAFA), one that will allow our national teams across all age groups to participate in CAFA tournaments. I do not need to reiterate the quality of teams present in Central Asia – Iran have become regular qualifiers for the FIFA World Cups in recent years, Tajikistan had qualified for the FIFA U-17 World Cup in 2019, while Uzbekistan are one of the stronger teams Asia, who have qualified for the FIFA U-17 World Cup 2023, and finished runners-ups and champions in the AFC U-23 Asian Cup and AFC U-20 Asian Cup, respectively.

With our national teams regularly playing teams of such calibre, especially away from home, Indian Football is indeed moving ahead at break-neck speed.



MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING



CAFA

October 30, 2023

AIFF-CAFA MoU paves the way for National Teams' participation in Central Asian tournaments

Afghanistan, Kyrgyz Republic, Turkmenistan, Iran, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are the six CAFA member associations

It was a historic day for Indian Football in Doha, Qatar, on Monday night, October 30, 2023.

In a move that could have a far-reaching effect on the development of Indian football, the All India Football Federation and the Central Asian Football Association entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which will open the doors for India's National Teams' participation across all age groups in both men's and women's competitions organised by the CAFA on an invitational basis.

The AIFF, which was represented by President Mr. Kalyan Chaubey, also had highly fruitful discussions with the CAFA officials on the opportunities for mutual benefits in all areas of football, with a specific focus on youth football, women's football, coach education, and refereeing.

AFC Deputy General Secretary Mr. Vahid Kardany was present, along with all the Presidents and General Secretaries of the CAFA member associations, when the MoU was signed.

Afghanistan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Turkmenistan, Iran, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are the CAFA member associations. The Central Asian Football Association is one of the five regional associations of the Asian Football Confederation. CAFA is currently headquartered in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

Speaking on the occasion, the AIFF President, Mr. Kalyan Chaubey, said, "Joining hands with CAFA will help us provide competitive exposure to our National Team players across all age groups. I would like to express my thanks to the management of the CAFA for accommodating our request to participate in the Central Asian competitions."



AIFF wins AFC President's Recognition Bronze award for Grassroots Football

Numerous special projects have been initiated as part of this endeavour, including the AIFF Blue Cubs programme, Blue Cubs Coaching Courses, Blue Cubs Leagues, Blue Cubs Football Schools, AIFF Grassroots Awards, AIFF Institutional League for Non-Professional Entities, and AIFF Project Diamond

It was a night to celebrate for the Indian Football fraternity on Tuesday, October 31, 2023 as the All India Football Federation has secured its second Grassroots Football award, with the previous one being earned in 2014. The accomplishment reflects AIFF's commitment to promoting football at the grassroots level, characterised by several innovative initiatives.

Numerous special projects have been initiated as part of this endeavour, including the AIFF Blue Cubs programme, Blue Cubs Coaching Courses, Blue Cubs Leagues, Blue Cubs Football Schools, AIFF Grassroots Awards, AIFF Institutional League for Non-Professional Entities, AIFF Project Diamond and several other projects at the grassroots level.

The AIFF's commitment to expanding participation is evident through various activities and events, including the AFC Grassroots Day 2023, AIFF Academy Accreditation, AIFF Golden Baby Leagues, Grassroots Coach Development Courses, Blue Cubs Leader Courses, and Grassroots Coach Educators Courses. It demonstrates AIFF's continuous efforts to nurture footballing talent from the grassroots, and ultimately raising the standards of both youth and senior teams in the country.

Commenting on the award, AIFF President Mr. Kalyan Chaubey said, "It is a good achievement for Indian Football and with this recognition from AFC, we are further motivated to do our best to impact the development of grassroots football in India. Our Grassroots Committee deserves much appreciation. Our aim and focus has always been to develop football from the grassroots level across the country and the result is there for everyone to see."



We need to be confident, positive and realistic, says Stimac ahead of World Cup Qualifiers

The real test begins now for the Blue Tigers, who are set to take part in the World Cup Qualifiers and the AFC Asian Cup in the coming months

SOUMO GHOSH & SRUTI CHAKRABORTY

In the not-so-distant past, Indian football fans erupted in euphoria as India triumphed in a thrilling showdown against Kuwait during the SAFF Championship final in July 2023. The Blue Tigers clashed with Kuwait not once, but twice – the first bout ended in a tense draw, only to culminate in a heart-pounding penalty shootout victory during the finals in the electric atmosphere of Bangalore.

India are slated to play Kuwait in their den, which carries the weight of destiny, a clash in the FIFA World Cup 2026 and AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027 Preliminary Joint Qualification Round 2 next week. If we trust the statistics, India have never emerged victorious against Kuwait on their home turf. However, there's hope that this time, the tides may finally change, and we could witness results that will be etched into history books.

The anticipation of playing two matches against Kuwait and Qatar in the World Cup qualifier matches is exciting and head coach Igor Stimac hasn't held back in sharing his views on the upcoming showdown and the preparations with www.the-aiff.com.

The business end of the year is here for the National Team. We play the World Cup qualifiers and then the Asian Cup. What are your thoughts on the team's development so far?

Yes, we have entered the new phase of our work, and we know it's going to be very hard and difficult on the boys. We are very optimistic about what's ahead of us. We know that the next few months until March will be very difficult. We might face some problems during this process. But we are very optimistic then that once the players, who are missing now, are back, we will become solid again and show strength on the pitch, no matter who we play against. So, the focus at the moment is how to replace those boys who were starting 11 players, such as Ashique Kuruniyan, Anwar Ali and Jeackson Singh (Currently nursing injuries). They were our strength in the latest successes we had. These boys played very good football; they were adding extra value to the whole team.

We need to find a way to make a new composition to balance the team which will provide strength, especially at the back because we started conceding some goals, which I did not like lately, although some of the goals came after very poor refereeing decisions. That's our priority now, but anyway, I'm glad to see that the boys are playing regularly in ISL and most of them are taking main roles in their teams and playing with lots of responsibility. It is a good and positive thing for the national team.

Do you find the group tough?

Yes, the group is very tough and challenging because we know there will be no easy opponents, and they are the top teams. So apart from that, from the third pot we got by far the best opponents available (Kuwait). So, the group is tough at the moment, but we need to approach it game by game and prepare for it. And as far as I'm concerned and with my experience in football, November to March will be difficult. To prepare well and to make sure that the national team gets enough time to secure the second spot in the group and qualify - that is our plan.

You are getting the squad together for a few days before the first game. How much will that help in getting the boys back to the desired level?

We started planning this camp a long time ago and we're going to have four to five days to execute some training sessions and drills and prepare well for the first game against Kuwait which is important because it's the opening game. We are quite clear about what needs to be done. It's going to be a very difficult and different game, so the boys need to adapt to that as soon as possible. And we are not going to have much time to do so, only one training session prior to the match day. So, difficulties and challenges will be there, but once again, we know what we can bring to the pitch, we know how to handle the situation. All we need to do is stay focused and well-concentrated on the task we're going to put to the players.





Does a different pitch change your tactic in any way or form or remain the same?

Poor pitches will not allow you to play and pass the ball at a certain speed which is needed for you to open the gaps and spaces between the lines. So, there will probably be less risk taken at the back, and we're not gonna take too much risk in such games. We're going to try to overcome those difficulties with the poor pitch in such a way that we try to play much more vertical football than it was what you could see in the past months. It's something we need to discuss, we need to try to execute the drills on the pitch on the new approach. We are quite confident that such an approach can bring us success.

We have played a couple of heated matches against Kuwait in SAFF. How do you plan to approach this game?

We could clearly see that Kuwait have enough quality in them, and we knew that the ranking they had was not a realistic reflection of the quality they have in the team. They are a far, far better side. After the game they played against Emirates, which was very competitive, it's quite clear that they can hurt any opponents. So, we need to be very focused, and very concentrated.

The main question here is how quickly our players can switch to the international mode, which is needed in this game. Anyway, we're going to have enough time this November, five days should be enough for them to switch on, to be aware of what needs to be done. And we're going to help them to do their best.

It seems India have been in a rivalry against Kuwait that's formed over the last couple of matches during SAFF. So how do you as a coach handle the situation in terms of psychology, before going into such a match?

The games we played against them (SAFF Championship) came after a long camp preparation. And our boys should not rely on the latest success in the quality football which we played against Kuwait because now we are in a different position. The boys are coming from a different pace of football. So, we're not gonna lie to ourselves and expect top quality football we're going to present there. Our focus is on the result and how to obtain the result in the opening game of the World Cup qualifiers. My advice for players will be to forget as soon as possible what happened in June and July against Kuwait and to concentrate on new challenges and new developments that might be ahead of us. And that's the best way of approaching this game.

Our form at home and away from home has been very different. How do you plan to address that?

You are right, and we are not hiding from that- we are aware of it. But some of the refereeing decisions were affecting our game, because to be honest, in the last two tournaments, we were victims of some poor referee decisions. It affected our boys. There was something wrong with our game against Iraq. The boys played brilliant football, the boys controlled the game, we were twice in the lead and then the referee came and made one poor decision which took us to the penalty shootout which can always take you in any direction. It happened to us. After a couple of poor refereeing decisions in games against Iraq and Malaysia, we were thrown back seven or eight places in the rankings, which is terrible. That's the main reason why I'm requesting the AIFF to organise as many home matches for India.

In recent times, Mahesh Naorem Singh, especially in the matches away from home, has been one of the key performers. What do you think has set him apart in terms of mentality?

I am very happy with him. He's one of those players who is enjoying his football with the full potential. He's a very talented player, he doesn't have any fear or problem while coming in front of the goalkeeper. The easy approach he has when he comes in front of the goal and scores goals is something that is bringing and adding an extra quality to our team. Mahesh is the player at the moment we are looking up to and who is giving us extra stability in this position as a first option and is giving us extra quality in passing, holding the ball and providing chances and key passes.

Last time, we played Qatar twice, both times away from home. How different could it be this time when we will face them on our home turf?

It would be very different, and we need to be on a very different side playing at home. That doesn't mean that we're going to go up there high and try to surprise Qatar and keep them under high pressure for 90 minutes because we have problems which I spoke about earlier. But we're going to find a way to hurt them. They have Carlos (Queiroz), who is a new manager there and they are giving some opportunities to new players. But there might be a chance for us to surprise them.

In the last qualifiers, we had a group which we thought was a comfortable one and we could do something. But somehow it ended in disappointment. At this time, can we emphatically say that we are far more prepared than we were?

You know, in 2019, we started our qualifiers at the beginning of our process, redeveloping the team, implementing many new young talented players and trying to find ideas of 11 to 15 players, who represent the country now. That's all behind us. We have a very solid team, we have certified players, who are there on the main list with another 13 players as a reserve option. So, the second phase has started. There will be some difficulties on our way because injuries are something that is never welcomed in football. We had a stable team with first-choice players a few months ago, and now we're missing three of them.





Jeackson was one of the strongest pillars of our team and our success. His stable form and his help in the build-up phase and good covering capacity for the front players are something which has given stability to the team. Now it's a chance for him to bounce back to the national team, take that role over, and show everyone that he can be that guy who will keep playing the same way. We just hope that the boy, who will get the chance in his place, will have a positive attitude and will add extra quality to the team.

Do you stay confident or apprehensive?

I'm always confident. I have to be confident because that's the only way for the coach to lead the team. Never mind the difficulties. But I'm also realistic. I need to point out the challenges and worries which are there. Everyone needs to be well aware of what kind of difficulties we're going to face. So that's the best way of approaching the game, just being realistic but positive, always positive.

So as far as I'm concerned, we're going to go all out with the intention to win the game. Is that going to happen? We don't know. But intention will be there. Definitely.

And the same thing will happen against Qatar. We are going to try to find a way to win against Qatar at home. As simple as that. The important thing once again, is to mention that whoever is there, whoever is representing the country, he needs to leave everything on the pitch for the country.

We played in Bhubaneswar in the Intercontinental Cup earlier. What are your thoughts on the facilities over there, which they provide to us?

We were very happy in Bhubaneswar and I would love to be there as much as possible with our national team because the facilities, the training, the quality of the staff and the organisational skills are fantastic. That's something each coach would love to have every time he gets the players together. Another point is obviously the travel to training. We have a wonderful gym there, we have wonderful training pitches. People in the government there are very nice, they are there at any point to provide everything that is needed for the national team. So, I use this opportunity once again, to give a big thanks for the support they give to the national team and I just hope that we can pay them back with another win.



Let's cohere tightly to win the massive game against Kuwait: Sunil Chhetri

The Indian skipper's fourth and perhaps last World Cup qualifying campaign presents the best chance to progress to the final round

SOUMO GHOSH & SRUTI CHAKRABORTY

Sunil Chhetri. Forever Young; a perfect example of may your hands always be busy, may your feet always be swift. In Indian football, the 39-year-old sets a record every time he steps onto the pitch. It will be no different when he leads India into Round 2 of the FIFA World Cup 2026 and AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027 Joint Qualification campaign.

The Blue Tigers' upcoming pre-World Cup journey will be Chhetri's fourth entry and 20th match in the quadrennial tournament, an Indian record. He has nine goals to his credit in the pre-World Cup, again the best by an Indian footballer to date.

But it hasn't stopped Chhetri from trying harder to chase his dreams. Currently, he is with the National Team, going through rigorous training sessions under Igor Stimac in Dubai. Yet, he took time out of his busy schedule to speak to the-aiff.com and provide a snapshot of what he feels about India's chances in the opening away tie against Kuwait (November 16), his young and talented teammates and his own precious offerings to his much-treasured Indian football that he served for 17 years now.

Historically, India's pre-World Cup campaigns have never gone beyond a certain stage. Can we expect a better performance this time from the present side?

I think we are at the right stage. This team probably are a strong side. Also, I must admit that we are in a strong group. Some really good sides are clubbed with us. But I think we are prepared, barring a few injuries here and there. It's a team that has played together for some time. And a lot of youngsters are there. Yes, we look good.

What has really transformed this team? Are we prepared enough to go to the next round?

I think it is just the morale of the team, or what has happened in the last six, eight months. A lot of boys have taken their places in the team. And that is why we are probably more prepared. Also, the World Cup qualifiers are happening at a time when a lot of us have a decent amount of game time under our belts. All these things do matter. Over and above, we played Kuwait twice a few months back, so we have better knowledge of them, though it works on both sides. We have played Qatar at least thrice in the last three years, which again helps. And we always know Afghanistan. We have played them enough.

So I think whenever we play these teams, we might play good or bad, but we will not be surprised by what we are playing against. Barring the away tie in Kuwait, we are aware of the atmosphere for the away matches against Afghanistan and Qatar.

So that is why I said we are more prepared. We have to turn up on the pitch and perform well. Our team have always relied on hard work, team spirit, and being together. A lot of other teams have individual flair and other things. Probably, we are not that team. And I've got no qualms in accepting that.

At home, we have done decently well. In away games, we haven't. If we have to go to the next round and be among the 18 best teams in Asia, we have to rectify our method. Here, every point in every game does matter, because the top two teams of every group qualify. So, we really have to work hard while starting against Kuwait in the away match. It's a difficult one. But, as I said, barring a few injuries, I think we are well prepared.

At the same time, these 18 teams won't have to play the qualifiers for the next Asian Cup. So, we can qualify automatically and reach the next round of the World Cup qualifiers, too.





Is it a realistic target?

When you say realistic, whenever we have done well, in the last four years, we have done it as a team. We all had a good game. We are always a team more than individuals. So, that's why every one of us has to be switched on. Take as much information as possible and be as prepared as possible. When we play on the 16th against Kuwait, it will be a little different from the one we played last time at home. Now the local fans are probably going to be hostile against us. Kuwait will be different because all teams are different when they play at home.

But they also will be under pressure because they, like us, will try to be in the first two teams in the group. So it's not going to be easy. We must commit minimal mistakes because, in these big games, small mistakes can cost you a lot.

A few of our key players are nursing injuries....

I think I want to restrain myself from talking about the injuries because I think a lot of importance has been given to the injuries of some of the team members. I love them. They know it and I'll miss them. But it's done. It's gone. I've made peace with it that they're not going to be here. Otherwise, It will take a lot of focus away from the boys who are going to replace them. We always say that we are a team rather than a bunch of individuals. Whoever is here will have to play and make sure that we give a good account of ourselves.

Do we have enough firepower to breach the rival goal?

If you see the stats of (Lallianzuala) Chhangte, Mahesh (Naorem Singh) and Sahal (Abdul Samad), I'm taking these names because they've done really well in goal assists. We don't play with two strikers under Igor's (Stimac) system. But these three boys have done really well in creating chances, assisting and scoring a few important goals. So, it is more of me being the lone man ahead and these three coming and helping as many as possible and also going back and defending well. We also have Brandon (Fernandes) with a lot of experience. I think the three boys in the last 8-10 games have done really well. Playing with two strikers is a little bit different, to be honest, a tad different from playing a lone striker. But I've done it at the club level. And I understand it fairly well.

Chhangte is consistent, honest, and full of hard work. He's our benchmark here in the national team. He, along with players like Sandesh (Jhingan), are the torchbearers of consistency and genuine hard work. These three are our pillars. And they encourage and motivate us a lot in the way they operate. Chhangte is not the one who speaks a lot. He is very quiet. But the way he operates, I think he's the most loved guy in the team, without people openly expressing it. I think we all respect his hard work. And the way he has consistently worked hard and done the right things, eating the right stuff, and stepping in at the right time. And being a good professional is why he's getting all these dividends.

Mahesh is gifted. Of course, he works hard, but he sees the game in a different manner. He is one of those players who are gifted in terms of touch, passing and understanding of the game. I don't want to add pressure on anyone. It's just been five or six months he is in the national team. But whatever little that I've seen of him, he's humble. He wants to work hard. He has got good examples to follow in the team. All the senior boys like him and help him. He has a proper footballing brain, he understands the game and he knows how to pass. I hope they get strong challenges from other boys to grab the place. But I also hope they keep the place because they're doing really well.

I want to include Sahal too. I think a lot of people probably do not understand how much he has changed in the last eight months from a guy who was struggling for not having a great domestic season and having a lot of trouble here and there. From then to now, when you watch him play for Mohun Bagan in the ISL, he stands out as the best player including all foreigners and all others. Even during training, he looks very confident and a different person. I hope he keeps his head on his shoulders and keeps performing.

As the most senior player, what is your advice to your teammates?

Well, I say try to stay calm. Understand the importance of the game. Keep the negative emotions under check and just do the basic right and work hard. Now, when I say it, it sounds so simple. But we have to do it.

When we are together, one of us might need a little bit more help that day. All of us should go and give it to him. We should make sure that none of us are singled out. Whether it's in terms of technical and tactical help on the pitch, or a tackle, or a verbal spat, or whatever small things, it should be all of us together. So, we'll try to stick together. This (Kuwait match) is a big game, a massive game.

This is your fourth pre-World Cup campaign. It was nearly 15 years ago when you played this tournament. Do you ever feel lonely?

Well, the age difference is evident, not only when I come for the national team, but also at the club. I understand that. But, I keep that aside. I don't judge myself or anyone else by their age. I don't judge any player when it comes to football by his age, whether it's younger or older. Important is what you are doing for the team, how good are you for the team, how much can you sacrifice? That's all.

As far as my job is concerned, I try to keep it simple. I go and I give whatever I have. More so now because I'm 39 and I still do the same thing that a youngster does. Even after being a father and my wife's sacrifice for so many years, I still leave them to come over here. So the least that I can do when I'm here is to give whatever I have. My message to the boys is simple. Do exactly what you're good at to the best of your abilities. All of us are good at something or the other. Make sure you do it to the best of your capability and keep your head calm. And after that, whatever the result comes, be it so be it but there shouldn't be any regrets. The fewer regrets, the better for us.





INDIA'S RECORD IN WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

FIFA WORLD CUP 1986

21.03.85

Indonesia **2** India **1**

(B.Nurdiansha-2)

(Krishanu Dey)

26.03.85

Thailand **0** India **0**

30.03.85

Bangladesh **1** India **2**

(Chunnu)

(Sisir Ghosh, Bikash Panji)

06.04.85

India **1** Indonesia **1**

(Narendra Thapa)

(Dede Sulaiman)

09.04.85

India **1** Thailand **1**

(Tarun Dey)

(N.Boongeang)

12.04.85

India **2** Bangladesh **1**

(Bikash Panji, Camilo Gonsalves)

(Ashis Bhadra)

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Atanu Bhattacharya, Pratap Ghosh.

Defenders: Mushir Ahmed, Tarun Dey, Alope Mukherjee, Abdul Majid, Derek Pereira, KG Murmu.

Midfielders: Sudip Chatterjee, Bikash Panji, Mauricio Afonso, Charanjit Lal.

Forwards: Krishanu Dey, Sisir Ghosh, Biswajit Bhattacharya, Babu Mani, Narender Thapa, Camilo Gonsalves.

Head Coach: Arun Ghosh.

INDIA FINISHED 2ND IN THE GROUP AND FAILED TO QUALIFY

FIFA WORLD CUP 1990

INDIA DID NOT PLAY THE QUALIFIERS

FIFA WORLD CUP 1994

07.05.93

India **2** Lebanon **2**

(Tejinder Kumar, VP Sathyan) (Babkin Melikiyan, Jamal Taha)

11.05.93

Hong Kong **2** India **1**

(Loh Wai Chi, Lee King Woh)

(Bhupinder Thakur)

13.05.93

South Korea **3** India **0**

(Hong Mhyung Bo pen, Moon Sik, Ha Seok Ju)

16.05.93

Bahrain **2** India **1**

(Khamis Eid Thani, Abdulamer Ali Ahmed)

(VP Sathyan pen)

07.06.93

Bahrain **3** India **0**

(Khamis Mubarak-2, Khamis Eid Thani)

09.06.93

South Korea **7** India **0**

(Lee Ki Boom-3, Kim Tae Young-2, Park Jung Bae pen, Ha Seok Ju)

11.06.93

Lebanon **2** India **1**

(Hassan Ayoub pen, Rafi Joulfagi)

(Bhupinder Thakur)

13.06.93

India **3** Hong Kong **1**

(IM Vijayan-2, Bhupinder Thakur)

(Wong Chi Keoung)

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Hemanta Dora, Yusuf Ansari, Rajeev Kumar.

Defenders: VP Sathyan, Illyas Pasha, Proloy Saha, Achinta Belel, Subir Ghosh, CV Sasi, Khaleel-ur-Rehman, Mathew Varghese.

Midfielders: Aqueel Ansari, Gunabir Singh, Jewel Bey, Tejinder Kumar, Harjinder Singh.

Forwards: Bhupinder Thakur, Francis Silveira, Bruno Coutinho, CV Pappachan, IM Vijayan, Abdul Khaliq.

Head Coach: Jiri Pesek (Czech Republic).

INDIA FINISHED FIFTH IN THE GROUP AND FAILED TO QUALIFY

FIFA WORLD CUP 1998

21.09.96

India **2** Phillipines **0**

(Raman Vijayan, Bruno Coutinho)

24.09.96

India **1** Sri Lanka **1**

(Carlton Chapman)

(Anthony Silva)

27.09.96

Qatar **6** India **0**

(Salem-2, Zamal, Walid, Soufi, Mubaraq)

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Feroz Sherif, Hemanta Dora, Virender Singh.

Defenders: Jiju Jacob, KV Dhanesh, Roberto Fernandes, Francis Coelho, Suramani Singh, Alope Das, Anit Ghosh.

Midfielders: Carlton Chapman, Basudeb Mondal, Ajay Singh, Bruno Coutinho, Savio Medeira, Gurinder Pal Singh, Sabir Pasha.

Forwards: IM Vijayan, Bhaichung Bhutia, Raman Vijayan, Dipendu Biswas.

Head Coach: Rustam Akramov (Uzbekistan).

FIFA WORLD CUP 2002

08.04.01

India **1** UAE **0**

(Jules Alberto)

15.04.01

India **1** Yemen **1**

(Bhaichung Bhutia)

(ASH Ghaleb Ghourbani)

25.04.01

UAE **1** India **0**

(Zubaith Khair)

GROUP A

04.05.01

Yemen **3** India **3**

(Adel Abdullah-3)

(Jo-Paul Ancheri-2, IM Vijayan)

GROUP A

12.05.01

Brunei **0** India **1**

(Jo-Paul Ancheri)

3RD PLACE

20.05.01

India **5** Brunei **0**

(Jules Alberto, IM Vijayan, Bhaichung Bhutia pen, Jo Paul Ancheri, Abdul Hakeem)

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Virender Singh, N Balaji, Prasanta Dora.

Defenders: Surkumar Singh, Ratan Singh, Deepak Mondal, Mahesh Gawali, Roberto Fernandes, KV Dhanesh.

Midfielders: Jules Alberto, Noel Wilson, Shanmugam Venkatesh, Khalid Jamil, Renedy Singh, Jo Paul Ancheri, RP Singh.

Forwards: IM Vijayan, Bhaichung Bhutia, Abdul Hakeem, Alvito D'Cunha.

Head Coach: Sukhwinder Singh (India).

INDIA FINISHED THIRD IN THE GROUP AND FAILED TO QUALIFY

FIFA WORLD CUP 2006

18.02.04

India **1** Singapore **0**

(Renedy Singh pen)

31.03.04

India **1** Oman **5**

(Renedy Singh pen)

(Amad Ali Sulaiman, Ahmed Mubarak-2, Mohammed Mubarak-2)

09.06.06

Japan **7** India **0**

(Tatsuhiko Kubo, Takashi Fukunishi, Shansuke Nakamura, Takayuki Suzuki, Yuji Nakazawa-2, Mitsuo Ogasawara)

08.09.04

India **0** Japan **4**

(Takayuki Suzuki, Shinji Ono, Takashi Fukunishi, T.Miyamoto)

12.10.04

Singapore **2** India **0**

(Sahdan Bin Daud, Khairul Amiri)

17.11.04

Oman **0** India **0**

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Sangram Mukherjee, Sandip Nandy, Naseem Akhtar.

Defenders: Dipak Mondal, Debabrata Roy, Habibur Rehman Mondal, Debjit Ghosh, Syed Rahim Nabi, Satish Kumar Bharti, Samir Naik, Mahesh Gawali, Vinu Jose, M Suresh, Gurjinder Singh.

Midfielders: Steven Dias, Shanmugam Venkatesh, Tomba Singh, James Singh, Renedy Singh, Jatin Singh Bisht, Rocus Lamare, Jo Paul Ancheri, Lawrence Gomes, Climax Lawrence.

Forwards: Bhaichung Bhutia, Ashim Biswas, Alvito D'Cunha, Abhishek Yadav, RC Prakash, Jerry Zirsanga, Bijen Singh.

Head Coach: Stephen Constantine (England).

INDIA FINISHED 3RD IN THE GROUP AND FAILED TO QUALIFY

FIFA WORLD CUP

2010

08.10.07

Lebanon **4** India **1**

(Roda Antar, Mohammad Ghaddar-2, Mahmoud Al Eli)

(Sunil Chhetri)

30.10.07

India **2** Lebanon **2**

(Sunil Chhetri, Steven Dias)

(Mohammed Ghaddar-2)

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Subrata Paul, Sandip Nandy.

Defenders: Surkumar Singh, Syed Rahim Nabi, Deepak Mondal, NS Manju, Gouramangi Singh, Mehrajuddin Wadoo.

Midfielders: Steven Dias, NP Pradeep, KN Ajayan, Climax Lawrence, Clifford Miranda, Renedy Singh, T Bungo Singh.

Forwards: Bhaichung Bhutia, Sunil Chhetri, Abhishek Yadav, Tarif Ahmed.

Head Coach: Bob Houghton (England).

INDIA LOST 3-6 ON AGGREGATE AND WAS ELIMINATED

FIFA WORLD CUP

2014

23.07.11

UAE **3** India **0**

(Hamdan Al Kamali pen, Mohammad Shehhi pen, Ismail Al Hammadi)

28.07.11

India **2** UAE **2**

(Jeje Lalpekhlua, Gouramangi Singh)

(Mohammad Shehhi, Ali Al Wehaibi)

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Subrata Paul, Karanjit Singh.

Defenders: Syed Rahim Nabi, Gouramangi Singh, Debabrata Roy, Samir Naik, Vincent Rebello, Rowilson Rodrigues, Mahesh Gawali, Raju Gaikwad, Harmanjot Singh Khabra, Robert Lalhlalmuana.

Midfielders: Steven Dias, Climax Lawrence, Clifford Miranda, Peter Carvalho, Mehtab Hossain, Jewel Raja Sheikh, Lalrindika Ralte, Baljit Sahni.

Forwards: Sunil Chhetri, Jeje Lalpekhlua, Sushil Kumar Singh.

Head Coach: Armando Colaco (India).

INDIA LOST 2-5 ON AGGREGATE AND WAS ELIMINATED

FIFA WORLD CUP 2018

12.03.15

India **2** Nepal **0**

(Sunil Chhetri-2)

17.03.15

Nepal **0** India **0**

11.06.15

India **1** Oman **2**

(Sunil Chhetri)

(Qasim Saad, Imad Al Hosseini pen)

16.06.15

Guam **2** India **1**

(Brandon Marquee, Travis Nicklaw)

(Sunil Chhetri)

08.09.15

India **0** Iran **3**

(Sardar Azmoun, Andranik Teymourian, Mehdi Taremi)

08.10.15

Turkmenistan **2** India **1**

(Guvanch Abylov, A.Amanov)

(Jeje Lalpekhlua)

13.10.15

Oman **3** India **0**

(Ahmed Mubarak, Abdul Aziz – 2)

12.11.15

India **1** Guam **0**

(Robin Singh)

24.03.16

Iran **4** India **0**

(Ehsan Haji Safi pen x 2, Sardar Amzoun, Ali Reza)

29.03.16

India **1** Turkmenistan **2**

(Sandesh Jhingan)

(A.Amanov, A.Sardareli)

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Subrata Paul, Gurpreet Singh Sandhu, Karanjit Singh.

Defenders: Pritam Kotal, Arnab Mondal, Saumik Dey, Narayan Das, Sandesh Jhingan, Rino Anto, Lalchchuamawia, Dhanachandra Singh, Aiborlang Khongjee.

Midfielders: Francis Fernandes, Lenny Rodrigues, Cavin Lobo, Rowllin Borges, Romeo Fernandes, Augustin Fernandes, Pronay Halder, Mohammed Rafique, Dhanpal Ganesh, Jackichand Singh, Seityasen Singh, Harmanjot Singh Khabra, Bikash Jairu.

Forwards: Sunil Chhetri, Jeje Lalpekhlu, Udanta Singh Kumam, Halicharan Narzary.

Head Coach: Stephen Constantine (England).

INDIA LOST IN THE GROUP STAGE OF ROUND 2

FIFA WORLD CUP

2022

05.09.19

India **1** Oman **2**

(Sunil Chhetri)

(Rabia Alawi Al Mandhar-2)

10.09.19

Qatar **0** India **0**

15.10.19

India **1** Bangladesh **1**

(Adil Khan)

(Saaduddin)

14.11.19

Afghanistan **1** India **1**

(Zulfegar Narzary)

(Seiminlen Dounge)

03.06.21

India **0** Qatar **1**

(Abdelaziz Hatim)

07.06.21

Bangladesh **0** India **2**

(Sunil Chhetri-2)

15.06.21

India **1** Afghanistan **1**

(Ovayz Azizi og)

(Hossein Zamani)

SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Gurpreet Singh Sandhu, Amrinder Singh, Vishal Kaith.

Defenders: Rahul Bheke, Adil Khan, Sandesh Jhingan, Subhasish Bose, Pritam Kotal, Sarthak Golui, Akash Mishra, Anas Edathodika, Nishu Kumar, Narender Gahlot, Mandar Rao Dessai, Chinglensana Singh.

Midfielders: Brandon Fernandes, Glan Martins, Pronay Halder, Vinit Rai, Suresh Singh Wangjam, Mohammed Yasir, Lalengmawia Ralte, Nikhil Poojary, Raynier Fernandes, Sahal Abdul Samad.

Forwards: Sunil Chhetri, Lallianzuala Chhangte, Udanta Singh Kumam, Bipin Singh Thounaojam, Seiminlen Dounge, Liston Colaco, Ashique Kuruniyan, Farukh Chaudhury.

Head Coach: Igor Stimac (Croatia).

INDIA FINISHED 3RD IN THE GROUP AND WAS ELIMINATED



2001 World Cup Qualifiers: When the dream run nearly shattered the reality

With a tally of 11 points, India missed out on the next round of WC Qualifiers by a solitary point, but scripted a campaign which has been unrepeatable as of now

AKHIL RAWAT

Qualifying for the FIFA World Cup remains Indian Football's biggest dream. Nine previous campaigns to reach the world's greatest single sporting event have been unsuccessful. But when you talk about India's best performance in a qualifying tournament, there's only one campaign that comes to mind – In 2002, when India missed out on reaching the final round by a solitary point.

"Definitely our best World Cup Qualifiers," prompts Mahesh Gawli, whose solid partnership in central defence with Deepak Mondal was key to India's famous 1-0 win over UAE in Bangalore. That's how Sukhwinder Singh's side kicked off the qualifiers. The Kanteerava Stadium, the stage for one of India's most sensational silverware wins at the SAFF Championship earlier this year, was also the venue for perhaps the nation's most high-profile victory of the century.

India were placed 124 in the FIFA Rankings. UAE, coached by Frenchman Henri Michel, were way up at 64th. India have not beaten a side ranked higher than that since. Michel had led France to third place at the World Cup in 1986 and Olympic gold in 1984 but was left scratching his head on the Kanteerava touchline on the evening of April 8, 2001, as his side fell short against the ever-so-determined Indians.

The lone goal, the result of a melee in the six-yard box, came from the right boot of Jules Alberto. It all started with Khalid Jamil's long throw to IM Vijayan, who expertly brought it down before his shot on the turn was blocked. But Alberto had sneaked in behind and managed to improvise a flick over Mutaz Abdulla in the UAE goal to send the stadium into a frenzy.

"The UAE match was one of the best of my career," says Renedy Singh, who bossed the left side of midfield. "They have always been a great side, and we're yet to even come close to beating them since.

"We had a lot of individual brilliance. Bhaichung (Bhutia) and Viju bhai (IM Vijayan) up front, (Jo Paul) Ancheri in the middle. Jules was on the right, I was on the left. Sukhi sir (Sukhwinder Singh) knew how to keep the team together. We came from different clubs, but were always on the same page with the national team," Renedy shares.

India eventually finished the group with 11 points - three wins (UAE and two versus Brunei) and two draws with Yemen. Only UAE, the group winners, made it through to the next round of qualification with 12 points. It was a campaign of what-ifs. A fortnight after the Bangalore win, ten-man India were beaten 0-1 by UAE in the reverse fixture in Al Ain. What if Bhaichung Bhutia wasn't sent off early in the second half? What if the 24-year-old, at the peak of his career, was available for the next match in Sana'a, where India had to settle for a 3-3 draw against Yemen.



"We would have made it to the second round," Renedy puts it simply. "We played so well, but unfortunately it wasn't enough," says Gawali. "Just one point made the difference. Our team and the coach were fantastic. We had motivation from all corners. Those memories stay with us."

Head coach Sukhwinder Singh knew his players in and out. The classic 4-4-2 yielded India 11 goals in six games, conceding only five. Opening up more on the campaign, Gawali says, "We knew that UAE were a superior side. Our coach gave us individual duties after studying them. The guidance of the senior players also helped a lot. That's the togetherness the coach brought into the squad."

What made the victory more special was the fact that such a young backline soaked the pressure from a top Asian side and kept a deserved clean sheet. Gawali and Mondal were 21, and only just stepping into the realm of international football. Full-back Surkumar Singh had turned 18 less than a month before.

"Our coordination in the team was very good. We used to understand each other so well. We knew each other's strong and weak points. Surkumar was good at running up and down but wasn't particularly strong in one-on-one situations, so we knew when to cover for him. Me and Deepak (Mondal) knew what each other could and couldn't do. Everyone knew everyone else's capabilities. That's what made that team strong," Gawali explains.

If the Gawali-Mondal partnership shone at the back, strikers Vijayan and Bhutia ran the show in attack, well complemented by Ancheri, who bagged four goals although playing as a midfielder. "My favourite was the long-ranger in Yemen from 35-40 yards out," says Ancheri, whose left foot was one of the best Indian football has ever seen.

Goals were never a problem for India, and the individual quality was top-notch. "IM Vijayan was like a magician. You didn't know what he was going to do next. Nobody taught him anything. He came from a village and became a star. Bhaichung Bhutia was like a fox in the box. We had a lot of leaders and naturally talented players in the team," says Gawali.

Twenty-two years later, the Blue Tigers are yet to match that tally of 11 points in World Cup qualifying. Gawali, now India's assistant coach, hopes the 2026 campaign could be the one to overhaul that record. "We've got a highly-skilled bunch of players with us, and hopefully the time has come to go one step better and make it to the next round," he says.





Jules Alberto: The man who scripted folklore and poetry

The solitary goal in India's famous 1-0 triumph over UAE in the 2002 World Cup Qualifiers has etched its name in Indian football folklore

SRUTI CHAKRABORTY

The Sree Kanteerava Stadium in Bangalore is considered a hallowed turf for Indian football. It has been a witness to numerous compelling stories and has played host to countless historic celebrations.

One of those carnival moments came on April 8, 2001; it added another indelible chapter in the storied history of Indian football. On that evening, India scripted a remarkable tale, clinching a sensational 1-0 victory over the United Arab Emirates during the 2002 FIFA World Cup qualifiers. The magical moment of the match came in the 71st minute when Jules Alberto Dias struck the all-important goal.

Though time may have dimmed the memory to some extent, the significance of that goal still burns brightly in the minds of Indian fans. Many of them vow to say it was India's finest day in international football this century.

"It was one of those beautiful memories which I still cherish and I'm sure a lot of Indian fans hold it in great regard," was the first reaction of Jules Alberto when www.the-aiff.com contacted him in London.

“It was an incredibly memorable goal for our team, and it gave a tremendous boost to our confidence, knowing that we could score against UAE. It wasn't just a momentous occasion for the goal itself; it had a profound impact on the entire team. We were all filled with excitement and newfound confidence, which translated into us playing exceptional football,” Jules said from his London residence.

The UAE, ranked 64th in the world then, 60 places above India, were expected to comfortably win all their group matches. But India winning 1-0 against UAE is something people still talk about.

“Despite being labeled as underdogs against UAE, who were expected to dominate us with five or six goals, we set our sights on scoring that one crucial goal and then ensuring we didn't concede, and that's exactly what our coach Sukhwinder Singh told us. Our primary focus was to maintain our lead and keep them from making a comeback. Kudos to our defensive team and coach for their outstanding performance. We played brilliantly, and this victory instilled a remarkable level of confidence in our team,” Jules added.

MISSED OPPORTUNITIES AND REGRETS

Do you have any regrets? “Oh yes, I do have some regrets. I would have loved to advance to the next round. The journey was challenging, particularly traveling to Yemen and playing on their turf, which was not easy. In the match before Yemen, we managed a 3-3 draw in an away game. Then came our crucial match against UAE, where Bhaichung (Bhutia) received a red card. If that game had ended in a draw, it would have been beneficial for us, putting us at the top. When we faced Yemen away from home without a key player like Bhaichung, who was one of the best in the country at the time, alongside (IM) Vijayan and other top-notch players, it was challenging,” said Jules.





"Where we missed a significant opportunity was when we played Yemen at home, resulting in a draw. Though we didn't lose, I believe that if we had won that game, it would have changed the entire scenario. We would have been one point ahead, a completely different situation from being one point behind.

"We emphasised the importance of seizing every opportunity on game day, typically about five or six chances per game, regardless of our opponents. We practiced diligently for set-piece situations, fully aware that approximately 70 to 80 percent of goals occur during these scenarios. We recognised that these moments were golden opportunities, and we prepared by working on various routines like long throw-ins, short throw-ins, and different types of throws," said the midfielder, who played on the right that evening.

REMEMBERING THE 2001 GOAL AGAINST UAE

When asked about the historic goal he scored, Jules's eyes lit up with enthusiasm, and a radiant smile graced his face as he began to recount the moment. He said, "What worked in our favour was our proficiency in aerial duels, with a strong team capable of heading the ball effectively. Our strategy for scoring goals involved using a specific routine. When Khalid (Jamil) was about to take a throw, the plan was for Vijayan to flick the ball into the box. Positioned behind him were me and Bhaichung, and Joe Paul (Ancheri) following just behind us and were ready to capitalise on the flick with our headers.

Although the execution wasn't flawless, it still worked to a significant extent. Vijayan managed to flick the ball, and I over ran but it ended up hitting one of their defenders and fell back right in front of me. My sole intention at that moment was to flick the ball over the onrushing goalkeeper. I had noticed the goalkeeper closing in on me from the corner of my eye, and it seemed like the only way to find the back of the net. So, I went for it and executed a flick over the goalkeeper. Bhaichung did an excellent job following up and blocking the defender, which allowed us to score the goal. While it wasn't a perfect execution, it was effective, and it was the primary mode of attack we had practiced for," remembered Jules.

Reflecting on this match, he said, "Our team had a rich football history, and we consistently performed exceptionally well against opponents from across Asia. While India did make progress in football, it was evident that other countries were progressing at a much faster rate. Their development was outpacing India's growth in the sport. We were proud to be part of the team during the National Camp, and during that time, there was a prevailing discussion about the UAE being coached by a top-class coach from France (Henri Michel). This prompted us to strive to demonstrate that India still belonged among the top football nations.

"Our team had a strong football legacy, but we recognised the need to work hard to keep up with the rapid progress seen in other countries, all while striving to maintain India's standing among the elite in international football," said the former Salgaocar FC footballer.



PRESENT SCENARIO

In about another week, India will face its first opponent Kuwait at the FIFA World Cup 2026 and AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027 Preliminary Joint Qualification Round 2 match. Jules is confident the team will perform with their best ability to reach the next round. He said, "Why not, indeed? Why should we doubt our chances if we do everything right? Personally, I believe it's all about having unwavering faith in our abilities and giving it our absolute best. To truly believe in something, you have to commit more than 100 per cent. It's not merely about believing in 100 percent but going beyond that threshold."

"Players like (Lallianzuala) Chhangte, Suresh (Singh Wangjam), Gurpreet (Singh Sandhu), Sandesh (Jhingan) are incredibly skillful, and in my opinion, they can stand toe-to-toe with anyone on the field if they play to their full potential. While there are formidable teams out there, I respect them, but I don't let their reputation overwhelm me. Ultimately, it's 11 players against 11 players on the field, not 15 or 16 against 11. If every player takes it as a personal challenge to outperform their opponent, that's the essence of football. Football is about one-on-one battles within the larger context of the game."

"Of course, there are principles and strategies advised by the coach for how to play with and without the ball. But if players embrace the individual challenge of being better than their counterparts, there's no limit to what they can achieve. It doesn't matter who the opponent is; if you go out there with the mindset of 11 players against 11, there's very little that can stop you. If we scored against strong teams like Qatar before, if we did it once, there's no reason we can't do it again", remarked Jules.

SUNIL CHHETRI THE EVERGREEN LEGEND

Jules spoke highly of Sunil Chhetri, and said, "I do watch our boys play and I think Sunil Chhetri, the evergreen legend, is truly a remarkable individual. He stands as the torchbearer of Indian football, and I firmly believe that young aspiring players should view him as an inspiring role model. It's not just about his goal-scoring abilities or his presence at the highest level of the sport. What truly sets him apart is his incredible consistency and the longevity of his career. He has displayed unwavering discipline, exceptional focus, and an unmatched level of concentration in the game. These qualities are not only a testament to his own dedication, but also a source of motivation for the players around him."

"Indian Football is growing and the way our AIFF President Mr. Kalyan Chaubey is taking baby steps to achieve their goals is remarkable. The recent inclusion of CAFA is another milestone that we have achieved and of course, the activities going on with baby leagues and women's football," Jules concluded.



STATE OF AFFAIRS

Women's football, youth development our top priority, says GFA President Dr Caitano Fernandes

From conducting record number of matches to increased focus on women's football, the hustle and bustle in Goa over the past year is for everyone to see

Dr Caitano Fernandes is a man in a hurry. It is not because he lacks composure or doesn't have time on his side. The reason is simple. The Goa Football Association President and SAFF Competitions Committee member strongly believes everything else surrounding his life can wait, but the welfare of football in the state cannot. Hence, he has taken up the task of 'Mission Goa Football' on himself.

On Monday, October 30, 2023, Dr Fernandes completed his one year in office. He has a report card to present that is truly impressive. For a man, who was considered a rank outsider only a few months before his election to the post of president, it is definitely an achievement to tick off most of the things he promised in his election charter.

"One year ago, when I became the GFA President, things were not at their best in Goa football. Everybody around was saying that it was sunset time for Goa football and the glory days were over. I didn't believe it," said Dr Fernandes.



“Instead, I prepared a vision plan, distributed it among the clubs and requested that they air their views on it. This was almost six months before I got elected. Once I was elected, my first and foremost job was to implement things that I highlighted in my vision plan earlier,” added the businessman from Dona Paula.

Dr Fernandes says his achievements are plentiful, and he believes that most of the things listed in the vision have been implemented.

“I took over on October 30, 2022. So far, we have conducted a record 826 matches in seven months to ensure all competitions in Goa finish on time. On two occasions, 16 matches were organised on one day, which is a record. More than 25 matches were played under floodlights, which is yet another record in Goa football. A record number of 7060 players took part in GFA competitions in the 2022-23 season,” said Dr Fernandes.

The GFA chief said that Goa has slowly returned to the position from which it could proudly claim itself as the leading light of Indian football. “For the 2023-24 season, GFA has implemented all leagues and player registrations on CRS. We are the first state association in the country to do so. Currently, we have a record of 18 leagues on CRS,” he pointed out.

However, what has thrilled Dr Fernandes most is the victory of Goa in the Tier 2 Junior National Championship for Girls in Jaipur, with a 1-0 victory over Andhra Pradesh. “It is an achievement for Goa after 22 long years. I consider it a huge triumph. My team is actively working towards the upliftment of women’s football in the state. We Organised a Girls’ U-14 League in January 2023 for the first time in GFA’s history. I can promise you that the days are not far when Goa will be one of the best in the country in women’s football,” Dr Fernandes said.



GFA is also working closely with the state government so that football in Goa receives infrastructural and financial support.

“We have managed to get six football grounds from the government for the exclusive use of GFA. At the same time, we have given a plan to the government. The honourable Chief Minister has sanctioned around Rs 6 crore for the development of football. If that money comes in, we will be able to change Goa football completely and bring back the glory days,” declared Dr Fernandes.

The GFA president feels that his organisation has miles to go before it can sleep. “Many things have been done, many things are still in the pipeline,” he said. The plan is to see the teams get to play 20/25 matches in the youth league this season and to organise more than 2000 matches across U-18 leagues.

“Wait for some time and see how things get transformed. The way we have planned, I am confident that very soon there will be more than 100 players from Goa playing on the national scene. Till then, hold your breath, please,” says Dr Fernandes with a laugh.



STATE OF AFFAIRS

Football in Himachal: Raising the bar in the Land of Gods

Deepak Sharma, Honorary General Secretary of HPFA, sheds a light on the various activities spreading the beautiful game in the state

To say Himachal Pradesh had ever remained one of the frontrunners in Indian football would certainly be an exaggeration. Despite occasional successes, the state was mostly considered among the also runs on the domestic circuit.

Things, however, have changed in the past few years. In the most noticeable way, to say the least. The lack of resources and infrastructure has not deterred football in Himachal from marching ahead. And to show the right direction, the Himachal Pradesh Football Association has done a commendable job in the last few years.

“We are a small state with limited resources,” said Mr. Deepak Sharma, the Honorary General Secretary of HPFA. “But it hasn’t stopped us from raising the bar in Himachal football. We are doing everything to take the game ahead here, with special emphasis on youth development and women’s football,” he added.

Mr. Sharma is not far from the truth. Certainly not. Even a casual glance at Himachal Pradesh’s football report card in the last one year would clearly show that there is no dearth of football activities in the ‘Land of Gods’. It is not only about organising tournaments; the HPFA has conducted a series of license courses, grassroots day celebrations, camps for junior boys and girls, inter-district and inter-college championships for girls.



“The Inter-college women’s championship was like a feather in our cap,” said Mr. Sharma. “Because never before in the state was such a tournament held. Yes, Himachal Pradesh University organised the event, but the entire technical support was provided by the HPFA,” explained Mr. Sharma, who is also a member of the All India Football Federation Executive Committee.

Having followed the ‘Vision 2047’ project of the AIFF, the HPFA has attached a lot of importance to grassroots development. In May 2023, the HPFA organised the AFC Grassroots Day Celebration at Khad Football Stadium in Una. The event featured the participation of six schools in tournaments with separate categories for U-12 and U-16 boys. The HPFA also made sure an exhibition match for girls was held on this occasion to promote and encourage greater participation of girls in football.

HPFA spread its grassroots wing further. The AIFF Grassroots Day was celebrated by HPFA on June 23, 2023, simultaneously at two places, Chamba and Sirmaur. More than 100 young footballers participated in the celebrations, where several coaches were available to guide and provide coaching tips to young players.

“Our relentless efforts have paid dividends,” pointed out Mr. Sharma. “Previously, Himachal players rarely went out of the state to play. But now the scene is different. Vishal Kaith, who plays for Senior India, is originally from Himachal.

“We feel particularly proud when we see our women footballers do well at the national level. Riya Sharma from Khad, Una, participated in the IWL as she was selected by Goa’s Churchill Brothers. Our boys are also doing well. Dheeraj Sharma is a young boy, he has been picked by ISL team Odisha FC,” he said.



The welcome surge in a good number of quality footballers coming from Himachal is a result of constant efforts in the area of youth development. The HPFA made sure that the state sub-junior boys inter-district championships and the U-17 boys league were held in time in Nadaun, Hamirpur, and Una successfully with a good number of districts and clubs taking part.

The HPFA Honorary Secretary said: "There is no dearth of efforts on our part. We are regularly in touch with the state government so that we receive more help in the form of resources and infrastructure. The government also trying its best to see football progress in Himachal Pradesh. I can assure the football fans that the day is not far away when Himachal Pradesh's football will be a topic of discussion in the Indian football fraternity."





Beach soccer in National Games: A staggering success story

Kerala were crowned the inaugural beach soccer champions, while Odisha and Services won the women's and men's football gold respectively

The National Games started in 1924 in Lahore as the Indian Olympic Games. Football became a part of the National Games much later; while men's football was first played in 1985, the women's event began in 1999.

The recently concluded 37th National Games in Goa, however, will be remembered for another first – the introduction of beach football and its successful conduct. Beach football is a relatively new discipline in the Indian context – the first official National Championship could only be organised early this year when the All India Football Federation staged it in Surat, Gujarat. The AIFF President, Mr. Kalyan Chaubey took a keen interest in promoting the sport and his tireless efforts did bear fruit almost immediately.

The success of the Surat tournament was truly infectious. It prompted the Indian Olympic Association to introduce beach football in the National Games too. In the end, the IOA didn't have to regret their decision as the new discipline turned out to be a huge hit at the Colva beach in Goa, both in terms of quality games and spectators' interest.

On the playing turf, or on the sand to be precise, Kerala's supremacy in beach soccer remained unchallenged as they got the better of Goa 7-5 in the final. This was Kerala's second title of the season, as earlier in the year they won the inaugural National Beach Soccer Championship in Surat.



However, it wasn't like Kerala's earlier matches when they virtually steamrolled all other opponents. Goa put up a good fight and had the ultimate champions on tenterhooks till the end.

Kerala, of course, were a superior side and scored through Musheer TKB (3), Rohith Y, Umarulumukthar KK, Muhammed Unais and Ali Akbar AP. For Goa, Pedro Antonio Gonsalves (2), Richard Cardoz (2), Carl Joshua Dsouza and Kashinath Subhash Rathod scored.

The bronze medal went to Lakshadweep, who beat Punjab 4-2. Mirsad (2), Mohammed Thahir, Mohsin scored for Lakshadweep. Karandeep Singh Manota, and Mohammad Thahir's own goal reduced the margin for Punjab. Eight teams participated in the competition, which was a well-contested event right from Day One.

On the football front, the men's title went to Services, while Odisha's girls bagged the women's event. Manipur remained the unlucky state as they made the finals in both competitions only to be pipped at the post.

In the men's event, Services emerged the proud winners, defeating Manipur 3-1 in the final. The teams were locked 1-1 at half time. While P Christopher Kamei put Services in the lead in the 13th minute, Phijam Sanathoi Meetei restored parity four minutes before the breather.



In the second session, Services shot ahead when Soibam Abhinash Singh scored an own goal in the 62nd minute. Manipur's hopes of making a comeback were dashed further as Rahul Ramakrishnan widened the margin well into the add-on time.

The third place went to Kerala, who defeated Punjab 4-3 in the tie-breakers after regulation time ended in a goalless draw.

The women's final was far more competitive as the match was extended to tie-breakers before Odisha could get the better of Manipur.

The tie-breakers were applied after the teams were locked 1-1 at the end of regulation period. Odisha had the last laugh in penalties, winning 4-2.

After a goalless first half, Odisha international Pyari Xaxa put Odisha in the lead in the 51st minute. However, Manipur restored parity in the 79th minute through Nongmeikapam Sibani Devi.

In the tie-breakers, Pyari Xaxa, Grace Lalrampari Hauhnar, Bannya Kabiraj and S Lynda Kom scored the goals in the first four penalties. Manipur found the target through Wangkhem Linthoingambi Devi and Phanjoubam Nirmala Devi.

In the bronze medal match, Haryana edged Bengal 1-0 with Tannu scoring the all-important goal in the 36th minute.



I-League 2023-24: Foreign stars continue to implant their footprints on Indian football

From Peter Hartley to Komron Tursunov, from Edu Bedia to Alexis Gómez, names from across the globe are once again lighting up the I-League

SRUTI CHAKRABORTY

India's National Coach Igor Stimac once famously said that the I-League has a tradition that no money can buy. The Croatian World Cupper was not far from the truth. There has not been one significant Indian footballer in the last two decades, who has not gone through the grind of the I-League before making it to the top. But then, a steady influx of quality foreign players has also helped a great deal in evolving the I-League.

The likes of Ranty Martins, Odafa Okolie, and Sony Norde often set the stands on fire with their exemplary displays. These overseas players not only elevated the league's overall quality but also contributed to an enhanced fan experience.

Over the years, clubs in the I-League have increasingly recognised the need to sign foreign players, and the 2023-24 season once again showcases their commitment to recruiting international talent across various positions.



This season, 26 foreign players from diverse nations have brought their skills and experiences to the I-League so far. The league has become a melting pot of footballing cultures, representing African nations such as Cameroon and Ghana, as well as talents from countries like Argentina, Spain, Brazil, the United Kingdom, and Tajikistan. This diversity creates an intriguing blend of playing styles that have captivated fans and promise a more exciting and competitive season.

One standout foreign player this season is Peter Hartley, who is making his I-League debut with Inter Kashi. Hartley's journey in professional football began at Sunderland AFC, where he made his senior debut. His career took him on various adventures, including a loan spell at Chesterfield FC and stints with clubs like Hartlepool United, Stevenage FC, Plymouth Argyle, and Blackpool FC. However, a significant turning point occurred when he joined the Scottish side Motherwell FC, initially on loan and later signing permanently.

In 2020, Hartley embarked on a new chapter in his football career by moving to India and signing with Jamshedpur FC. His immediate impact was remarkable, establishing himself as a key player for the team. Under the guidance of Jamshedpur FC's head coach, Owen Coyle, Hartley's leadership qualities came to the forefront, leading to his appointment as the team captain.

Peter Hartley's captaincy proved pivotal for Jamshedpur FC as they clinched the prestigious ISL League Shield in the 2021-22 season. Hartley's journey from England to India exemplifies the global nature of football and the transformative impact a player of his calibre can have on a team's fortunes.

Inter Kashi Head Coach Carlos Santamarina remarked, "Peter is a great player and I have been with him in Jamshedpur. From the moment I joined Inter Kashi, his name stood out as a football maestro. The way he perceives the game, his boundless energy, and the invaluable insights he brings to the team make him an asset beyond measure. His presence will be like an additional assistant coach to me throughout the season. We're delighted to welcome him to the team, and his influence promises to be a game-changer."

Another foreign star who has made a significant impact in the I-League is Komron Tursunov, currently representing two-time I-League champions Gokulam Kerala FC. Hailing from Tajikistan, Tursunov first made waves during his time with Mohun Bagan, contributing to their title-winning I-League campaign in the 2018-19 season under coach Kibu Vicuna. His dynamic playing style and impressive performances captured the attention of fans and football enthusiasts.

Following his successful stint at Mohun Bagan, Tursunov transferred to Churchill Brothers FC Goa for the subsequent season, showcasing his goal-scoring abilities with six goals. He continued his journey with Rajasthan United in the 2020-21 season, leaving an indelible mark with stellar performances. Before that, he had plied his trade with TRAU FC, further solidifying his reputation in Indian football.

In the current season, Komron Tursunov joined Gokulam Kerala FC, aiming to make another mark and contribute to the team's success. Tursunov's influence extends beyond club football, as he has also represented his national team, Tajikistan, against India in the Intercontinental Cup 2019, even managing to find the back of the net. His journey in Indian football continues to captivate fans, and he remains a prominent figure in the I-League, striving for victory with each new opportunity.

Eduardo Bedia, who was the first player to score a goal for Indian club FC Goa in the AFC Champions League match in 2020 against Persepolis FC, has joined Gokulam Kerala FC this season. Bedia brings vast experience in Indian football, having played in the country from 2017 to 2023. With over 100 appearances and 13 goals, he is a seasoned professional who adds depth and quality to the league.

The I-League also boasts talents like Faysal Shayesteh, now with Sreenidi Deccan FC, who has four goals in 22 appearances, and Captain David Castaneda, also with Sreenidi Deccan FC, a goal machine for the Hyderabad club who scored an impressive 15 goals in 21 matches in the previous season. These players have already left their mark on the league and are set to dazzle fans once again in the upcoming season.

Mohammedan Sporting SC has bolstered their squad by signing three foreign players: Mirjalol Kasimov from Uzbekistan, Alexis Nahuel Gomez from Argentina, and Eddie Gabriel from Honduras. These additions are poised to bring international flair and a new dimension to the squad's capabilities.





A league that takes football far and wide

As is usually the case every season, the appealing geography of the I-League widens even more in 2023-24

SOUOMO GHOSH

It's a new season, and the I-League comes with three clubs that will play the league for the first time ever, together with one club that return to the league after a gap of four seasons.

Shillong Lajong FC, who have entertained Indian Football fans in the past, are now back once again, having won the Second Division League last season, and will be joined by Delhi Football Club, who finished behind them in the third tier of Indian Football. Two other debutants are corporate entries into the league as they look to spread the game across newer territories – Inter Kashi from Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh, and Namdhari Sports Academy in Sri Bhaini Sahib, Punjab.

Inter Kashi are one of the new clubs that have caused some interest among Indian Football fans with a host of top signings, as they look to make a strong side that can churn out some good performances. Defender Peter Hartley, a product of the famous Sunderland Academy in England, who has been recruited by Inter Kashi this season, is no stranger to Indian Football. The 35-year-old had played a crucial role in Jamshedpur FC's Indian Super League winning campaign in 2020 and will now be looking to take on the challenge of helping a new club grow and prosper in the I-League.

“I’ve watched the league before, and I think it’s a very good competition with some really strong teams that could potentially cause problems for bigger teams in the ISL too,” said Hartley. “I think Inter Kashi have created an environment that could give us an opportunity to do something similar, to create history. I’m very excited about this season.”

The I-League is set to be played across 10 venues so far this season, much like every year, it takes up the burden of spreading the message of football far and wide across the subcontinent. Be the biting cold of Srinagar, Shillong, or Aizawl, or the sweltering heat of Kozhikode or Goa, the I-League provides a rather wide range of conditions for the players to play and adapt to.

The big cities aside, I-League is also known for venturing deep into unknown territories where football hasn’t made much inroads yet. Places like Varanasi, Lucknow or Bhaini Sahib were never prominent on the Indian football map, but the scenario has changed this season. Bhaini Sahib, around 70 kilometres from Ludhiana, will play host to two I-League teams – Namdhari Football Club and Delhi FC.

Goalkeeper Tenzin Samdup, a product of the Bengaluru FC academy, has been a journeyman in the past few years and feels that the addition of the Namdhari Football Stadium in Sri Bhaini Sahib to the I-League really shows how diverse it can be.

“This league tests you, and the fact that we are going to such a wide range of venues across India to play really takes a lot of character,” said Samdup, who admitted it was his search for more game time that led him to Namdhari.



"It's a very interesting project that this club has taken up. They have some excellent facilities, and the people working around the team are an extremely dedicated bunch," said Samdup. "As venues go, Sri Bhaini Sahib is probably different from all other venues in the I-League. It is more like a bigger village with great football facilities. I believe that as a footballer, your experience should not just be about big cities and hotels but also in places like this, where you can concentrate on your game and introspect about yourself.

"Being so close to the Namdharis over the last month and a half, I've learned that they never go down without putting up a courageous fight, and I've seen that attitude grow in many players during our camp here, even those like me, who are not from Punjab," he said.

While the four new entrants into the league look to find their footing, the traditional heavyweights like Gokulam Kerala, Sreenidi Deccan, and Mohammedan Sporting are all set for the big jostle that would ultimately lead to promotion to the Indian Super League for one team.

The Malabarians, two-time champions, have made their intent clear with signings like Barcelona Academy product Nili Perdomo, and Tajikistan international Komron Tursunov to bolster the attack, while experienced heads like Salam Ranajan Singh and former Indian international Anas Edathodika will strengthen the back line.

Sreenidi Deccan have roped in midfielder Ibrahim Sissoko of Côte d'Ivoire, who has experience playing in Germany, Spain and Portugal, a signing that is expected to bridge their strong defensive and attacking units. Mohammedan Sporting, on the other hand, have brought in Honduras international Eddie Hernandez to strengthen their attack. However, the presence of local talent David Lalhlansanga could also prove to be an exciting prospect. The 21-year-old forward shone for the Black and White Brigade in the Durand Cup this season, ending as the joint highest scorer of the tournament with six goals to his name. It is players like these that capture the imagination of Indian Football fans.





AIFF Grassroots Committee launches Blue Cubs League

The All India Football Federation's Grassroots Committee meeting was held over video conferencing on Tuesday, October 17, 2023, under chairperson Mr. Mulrajsinh Chudasama.

In attendance were AIFF Vice President Mr. NA Haris, Acting Secretary General Mr. Satyanarayan M, Treasurer Mr. Kipa Ajay and committee members, including the newly-appointed Deputy Chairperson, Mr. Kotagiri Sridhar, Ms. Shukla Dutta, Mr. Ratankumar Singh, Mr. Sandeep Desai, Mr. Kiyeka A Sumi, Mr. Hmingthansanga, Mr. Aleixo Francisco da Costa, Mr. John Neelam, and Mr. Deepak Sharma.

Chairperson Mr. Mulrajsinh said, "I really want to thank all the members who have been working extremely hard for our grassroot activities. Today, as we launch the Blue Cubs League, I think it is the day when all the clubs and the state associations are waiting for this launch to happen. We have to make sure we spread awareness of the programme through various channels and make it successful.

"We have been nominated for the AFC Grassroots Awardee 2023 in the Bronze category this year, and I believe this is just the beginning. We need to upgrade ourselves from bronze to silver in Indian Football," the Grassroots Committee chairperson said.

The Committee congratulated the Anantapur Sports Academy, Andhra Pradesh, which has been shortlisted for the AFC special award during the AFC awards night in Doha on October 31, 2023. India has also been nominated for the AFC grassroots bronze-level award. The Grassroots Committee members said the efforts should be to reach the gold standard of AFC at the grassroots level.

The Grassroots Committee also endorsed the participation of more women leaders at the grassroots level so as to see more women actively promoting development and taking the initiative to encourage more girls to be part of grassroots football. The decision has been endorsed by the women's and the grassroots committees. Both committees felt that if every state implements the decision, it will bring more girls into football to further boost the grassroots structure in India.



AFC Women's Olympic Qualifiers: An unbating reality check for Blue Tigresses

The Indian Women's Team suffered defeats against Japan, Vietnam, and hosts Uzbekistan in Round 2 of the Olympic Qualifiers

AKHIL RAWAT

Five losses in five in the Asian Games and the AFC Women's Olympic Qualifiers Round 2. One could say it's been a couple of months to forget for the Indian senior women's team, but that's not how it should be. There's nothing to forget, rather everything to learn. All five opponents were ranked higher than India, but that's not an excuse.

In the Asian Games, India went down by the narrowest of margins in both games. However, in the Olympic Qualifiers, the story panned out quite differently as the Blue Tigresses got outclassed in all three games against World Cup sides Japan and Vietnam, and hosts Uzbekistan. "We were not even close," admitted head coach Thomas Dennerby.

Sport is about winning. But not all about it. When you lose, you learn. When you lose big, there's a lot to learn. Without a doubt, the lessons the Blue Tigresses have taken from the Olympic Qualifiers will go a long way in shaping their future. No doubt the ones hurt the most by the results are the 22 Indian women who wore the orange of India in the three games in Tashkent.

The difference between the level of Indian women's football and the world's elite, where India aspire to be, could not have been clearer after the match against Japan. To their credit, the Blue Tigresses did very well, being only 0-1 down at the break. But when it rained, it poured, and then came six more unanswered goals in the second half.

"It's a big step to enter the absolute top level of teams like Japan and Australia. But it's definitely not impossible," said Dennerby. How far exactly are India from getting there?

"It's hard to answer that. It comes with good long-term planning. First of all, we also need to have a proper league, play a game every weekend, have at least five to six sessions a week regularly, all year round, and play football 11 months a year and so on," added the Swede.

The good news is that the next few months will keep the Indian players busy with the Indian Women's League, which is set for a historic revamp and will be played on a home-and-away basis for the first time. Beginning on December 8, the league is set to continue until March. There will be a second division for the first time this season as well. Other than that, immediately after the conclusion of the Olympic Qualifiers, several Blue Tigresses contracted to Gokulam Kerala FC like Grace Dangmei, Shilky Devi, Sandhiya Ranganathan, Soumya Guguloth and Sowmiya Narayanasamy got more opportunities to rub shoulders against the best of Asia at the AFC Women's Club Championship in Thailand.

And it was a tournament to remember for the Malabarians, as they finished runners-up to Japanese champions Urawa Red Diamonds Ladies in their group. Anthony Andrews' side held Chinese Taipei's Hualien 1-1 before impressively coming from behind to beat hosts Bangkok FC 4-3 to end with four points.





"But of course, it's not a step you take in a year. It could take two or three years to take that step to reach the best. But India definitely have talented players. That's not the issue. The issue is to have a programme for those players," continued Dennerby.

"Now we're trying to reach the level of the teams that are ranked around 40-50. If we take the first ten steps on the ranking, that is good. If in one or two years, we can take another step to be around 40, that would be super good."

The ultimate step would be to be among the top 10 in the world where Japan is at the moment, which can only be achieved with proper long-term planning and immaculate execution.

The new cycle of the Indian women's team begins now. Eyes will be on qualifying for the AFC Women's Asian Cup in 2026, which serves as the qualification event for the 2027 FIFA Women's World Cup. Making it to the World Cup in four years' time is not an unrealistic target for the Blue Tigresses. 32 teams compete in the tournament, and India are ranked 61. India have shown that they are not far from the World Cup teams in terms of quality. The journey starts now.



Shooting Range

AFC Women's Olympic Qualifying Tournament, Round 2 - Uzbekistan







AIFF Executive Committee meeting: FIFA President to attend Santosh Trophy final

The All India Football Federation's Executive Committee met at the Football House in New Delhi, on Thursday, November 9, 2023.

President Mr. Kalyan Chaubey chaired the meeting, which was attended by Vice President Mr. NA Haris, Treasurer Mr. Kipa Ajay, Acting Secretary General Mr. M Satyanarayan, along with members Ms. Valanka Alemao, Mr. Menla Ethenpa, Mr. Avijit Paul, Mr. Syed Husnain Ali Naqvi, Mr. Mohan Lal, Mr. GP Palguna, Mr. Arif Ali, Mr. Syed Imtiaz Hussain, Mr. Deepak Sharma, Mr. Vijay Bali, Mr. K Neibou Sekhose, Mr. Anilkumar P, Ms. Tababi Devi, Ms. Pinky Bompal Magar, Mr. Shabbir Ali, Mr. IM Vijayan. Mr. Mulrajsinh Chudasama, Mr. Caitano Fernandes, and representatives from FSDL were present as special invitees.

The President informed the Executive Committee of his detailed discussions with FIFA on the Santosh Trophy and several other projects. He said that the National Football Championship for the Santosh Trophy, which will be held in Arunachal Pradesh this season, will be known as the FIFA Santosh Trophy.

"I am happy to announce that after having discussions with FIFA, the Santosh Trophy will now be known as the FIFA Santosh Trophy. This entails that a team of FIFA officials will come to have a meeting with Arunachal Pradesh officials on the conduct of the tournament," explained Mr. Chaubey.

"We also expect the FIFA President (Mr Gianni Infantino) to be present for the final on March 9 or 10," he said.

FIFA's Chief of Global Football Development and renowned coach Mr. Arsene Wenger is set to visit India later this month, and the AIFF President announced that his visit would open up a new chapter in India's youth development plans and projects.

"We will hold detailed discussions with Mr. Wenger on plans to establish the proposed FIFA-AIFF academy. Our plan is not to have one, but five academies, one across each zone in India. India being a big country, I personally feel, one academy will not be enough, since it could throw up only 25-30 players in one batch. So, we have taken up this ambitious project of five academies."

Mr. Chaubey said that he also has a plan to establish a goalkeepers' academy to produce quality custodians. Himself a former India goalkeeper, the AIFF President told the members that he had a meeting with Germany's legendary former goalkeeper Oliver Kahn, who was in India recently on a personal visit.

Mr. Chaubey's suggestion that in order to spread the game far and wide, some of the I-League matches could be played in Jharkhand, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh cities, was accepted by the Executive Committee.

The Executive Committee congratulated Mizoram's assistant referee Ms. Lalthansangi on the unique achievement of passing the men's referee's fitness test. The Committee expressed hope that Ms. Lalthansangi, apart from her duties in women's football matches, will also officiate in men's games.

The Executive Committee condoled the death of former India players Mohamed Habib and Prabhakar Mishra, and observed a minutes' silence. The Committee ratified the decision to terminate the contract of Dr. Shaji Prabhakaran as the Secretary General, and appoint Mr. M Satyanarayan as the Acting Secretary General of the All India Football Federation.





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