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**THE BEAUTIFUL GAME IS
SPREADING ITS WINGS**

- Kalyan Chaubey
President, AIFF

**AIFF AGM
A HUGE SUCCESS
IN HYDERABAD**



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President's Note

A giant leap towards taking the game to every nook and corner of the country

Kalyan Chaubey

On September 10, 2024, the All India Football Federation President, Shri Kalyan Chaubey, presided over the Annual General Meeting of the AIFF held in Hyderabad. In the AGM, attended by the full house of the AIFF, Shri Chaubey not only addressed the members to mirror the functioning of the federation but also shared his views and thoughts on the beautiful game that would go a long way in taking the game to the furthest corners of the country.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Honourable Chief Minister (Shri A Revanth Reddy) and the Government of Telangana.

On 16th February 2024, just six months ago, I was travelling to Jabalpur. There was a tournament in Madhya Pradesh where Sri Amit Deb invited me. But from Kolkata to Jabalpur, there was no direct flight. So I had a six-hour layover in Hyderabad. I thought rather than sitting idle at the airport in Hyderabad for six hours, I could utilise that time. My office spoke with the Chief Minister's office and requested a meeting, explaining that I would be in Hyderabad for six hours and need to travel from Hyderabad airport to the Vidhan Sabha Bhawan and back to the airport within that time. I am happy that the Honourable Chief Minister responded to the request and met with me during the Assembly Session. We spoke for about half an hour to 45 minutes. He was also very happy to see my enthusiasm.

We discussed that, in Hyderabad, there was a time when football was popular in this part of the country. We have seen six captains from Hyderabad. One of the captains, Shabbir Ali bhai, is also with us. We are very proud to have him in our ex-co. The remaining others are Dronacharya (Syed) Nayeemuddin, Mohammed Habib, Mohammed Akbar, and Victor Amalraj, who is our technical committee member.

So, the city has such a rich football legacy. We haven't seen much football here in the last 30 years, which is a



matter of concern. I shared this with him, and he was very happy to provide all the support a government could offer. Within three or four months, the government completely renovated the Gachibowli Stadium. They spent around Rs. 16 crores, and the stadium was renovated to meet FIFA standards. That's how we hosted this Intercontinental Cup. So for this, I want to thank the Government of Telangana.

I am happy to have a team like you, where everyone puts in extra effort for football, whether it comes from Nivia as a partner. For decades, Nivia has been involved. Wherever we see football, Nivia is there, not only in football but also in other sports. So, when the owner of Nivia met me in a scheduled meeting, during discussions, I said we have nearly two lakh registered players, and some of the kids find it difficult to purchase their first set of kits. I said, what if we could provide them with at least a one-time discount? He said okay, we will provide them a 40%-50% discount. I am sure this gesture will definitely help thousands of kids to get playing kits etc. at a reasonable price.

Gujarat has successfully conducted a franchise league in Ahmedabad. We have seen huge involvement from the urban community. Recently, some of you visited Kerala, and you saw how football is thriving in the Super League Kerala. I received a video call from Mr. Ammu, President of the Haryana Football Association. He showed me the number of girls playing football.



I am sure you all will appreciate that we saw a 138% increase in women's football registration across India. Goa hosted an award show and revived the Bandodkar Trophy.

I would like to thank Dr. Gandhi and Mohanlal Ji and their entire team (of Chhattisgarh Football Association) for how they conducted back-to-back BC Roy and Swami Vivekananda tournaments, and that too in a place like Bastar. Two weeks ago, the Honourable Home Minister visited Chhattisgarh, and the Government of India has taken an initiative that by 2026, they want to address the Naxal issues. The Honourable Chief Minister of Chhattisgarh acknowledged the effort of the All India Football Federation and how football has brought change in that region. This became national news in The Times of India.

In the last 40 years, we haven't seen much football in Uttar Pradesh. The only multipurpose stadium in Lucknow, the K.D. Singh Babu Stadium was left unused since 1989. Uttar Pradesh has a population of nearly 25 crores, which is like a country in itself. I had the opportunity to meet the Honourable Chief Minister, Yogi Adityanath ji. I asked him, how can Uttar Pradesh be excluded from the football development of India.

Without Uttar Pradesh, football cannot develop. So he asked me, what do you want? I said I wanted basic infrastructure to play football. To promote any sport, what do you need? You need to have a quality championship. Quality championships should be played with quality players and should be hosted in quality infrastructure.

He promised me 18 mini stadiums in 18 commissariats and 827 football fields in 827 blocks. It will definitely attract state Government investments of approximately Rs. 1000 crores. You see, it is not an easy thing to convince a government where football has not been played for a long time and receive this kind of support. I think AIFF deserves the credit and applaud for these initiatives. We all know football has huge potential, and we will definitely put our best for the development of it. I would also like to congratulate the newly elected president of Mizoram FA, Mr. Mr. Lalnghinglova Hmar. We have set a precedent where a sportsman, a football lover, first became a football administrator, then the secretary of Mizoram FA and later contested elections, becoming an MLA, and eventually a Sports Minister.

Last month, all the President or Secretary of North Eastern MA sat and discussed how they could organise the North East Football League, because we know that in this part of the country, football is really popular.

I would also like to congratulate the Punjab Football Association for taking several initiatives to organise women football.

I thank Mr. Neibou Sekhose for taking me to the Chief Minister of Nagaland. Nagaland has a population of nearly 17 lakh, a very small, tiny state. I said, at least you can host a few football matches, if not an entire tournament, but a few matches. So now one of the I-League teams will play in Nagaland for three matches, in Kohima, and the Government of Nagaland will support it.

Alone, you can achieve only small things, but as a team, you can accomplish much. So let's combine our efforts and contributions



for the development of football. Let us all come together and see how best we can promote football as a sport in our Country.

In one calendar year, we hosted 18 national championships, arranged 25 senior national exposure matches, and built a strong relationship with FIFA. The great Arsène Wenger and FIFA supported India in starting an under-13 FIFA academy in Odisha, India. We are going to build three or four more in other parts of the country. So definitely, in two years, we have tried to do many things, but in a country like India, when we got this opportunity, we were already around 100 in the FIFA rankings. So while we were in the top 100, others were not resting. They are also working at the same pace. They are not going to lose their position easily. They will not let us take their position. So we have a long way to go.

A step will take us a mile. To walk a mile, we need to take the first step. So, thank you very much for your patient hearing. I will share with you what the All India Football Federation is doing, what has been done, and what we are going to do. With all your support, I think we can achieve our goals.

Thank you very much.

AIFF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

10TH SEPTEMBER 2024

HYDERABAD, TELANGANA



AIFF ExCo: India U20 to feature in I-League; National teams to get high-altitude training camps at Arunachal's Tawang

The Executive Committee of All India Football Federation in its meeting at Hyderabad Monday, September 10, 2024, discussed and proposed to have India Under 20 men's national team participate in I-League competition.

With an eye on AFC Asian Cup 2027 and Asian Games 2026 participation, the AIFF is preparing well in advance having recently assembled an Under 20 squad and will continue to scout talents on-going basis. The proposal is mooted with an idea to have India U20 play in I-League to ensure gaining competitive gametime and to maintain match fitness throughout the year, as I-League endures long season. The India U20 national team will get amnesty from promotion-relegation.

Additionally, the Indian national team is set to get a permanent address for high-altitude training camps, as required. The ExCo members welcomed and accepted the proposal from Arunachal Pradesh Football Association to offer facilities at the newly launched stadium at Tawang, for India national team training camp. Members felt that Tawang, situated at 10,000 feet from sea level, will be an ideal location for high-altitude camps in future to acclimatize squad according to the international competitions.

In another development, the Annual General Body meeting of AIFF, which was held following the ExCo meeting here today, the members discussed the renewal, termination and eventual settlement of claims under the federation's contract with former Head Coach Igor Stimac.



Noting that former the Head Coach had filed a claim of \$920,000 before the FIFA Football Tribunal before eventually entering into a full and final settlement with the AIFF, the members called for an independent inquiry into the internal procedures that had been followed and the personnel that were involved when the Head Coach's contract had been renewed in 2023 on unapproved and unfavourable terms, which eventually left the AIFF in a compromised negotiating position leading to significant financial detriment to the federation in the settlement of the claim.

Members also expressed their apprehension as to how a former employee, who no longer holds any positions in Indian football, continues to represent AIFF in various committees of the South Asian Football Federation and Asian Football Confederation and requested the AIFF ExCo to write to these bodies and action be taken to curtail such practices.



Kalyan Chaubey: Hyderabad could be our next gateway for talent development as Telangana joins AIFF's new partnership endeavour with Indian states

As the Intercontinental Cup 2024 concluded, Hyderabad – the City of Pearls woke up to the next dawn having chartered its journey into the elite and ever-growing list of Indian cities as FIFA-ready international hubs.

The historic Gachibowli Stadium today dons a refreshingly new look infused with an estimate of approximate Rs 16 crores investment in renovation and restoration of its past glory. The speed at which Telangana government moved in last six months to announce its arrival at international stage, brings both hope and excitement for the future. The successful conduct of the Tri-Nation Intercontinental Cup could just be the springboard that was needed to relaunch Hyderabad into the international football map once again, after the hiatus of 16 long years.

As the destiny would have had it, All India Football Federation President Sh. Kalyan Chaubey, in February 2024 made an unscheduled meeting request (to make use of his six-hour flight layover at Hyderabad) to the Honourable Chief Minister of Telangana Sh. Revanth Reddy, who not only obliged by taking time out from the State's assembly session but also spent quality time in discussing Indian football, Hyderabad's legacy and Telangana's partnership opportunities.

Recollecting the meeting Sh. Kalyan Chaubey said, "I'm glad the Honourable CM Sh. Revanth Reddy Ji could meet during his busy Assembly session, and we two could discuss and deliberate on Telangana's collaboration with AIFF. The Honourable CM immediately expressed his keenness to onboard the footballing journey in reviving the sport in the State. Six months down the line, I'm thrilled to see the work being done at Gachibowli Stadium, the new and refurbished infrastructure and the excitement within the state administration to see Hyderabad playing host to its first international football event after 16 years.

“It gives me confidence in our partnership with the State and a push to explore how we can make Hyderabad a permanent home to not just international football events, but also to develop it as a gateway for talent grooming,” added Sh. Chaubey.

Over the last 2 years, AIFF has embarked upon forging newer partnerships with various Indian States to bring with on board for an inclusive football growth in the respective regions. Telangana being the latest to join the bandwagon, while just days prior, Uttar Pradesh CM had announced a massive infrastructure thrust in the State unveiling a plan for 827 fields and 18 mini stadiums in 18 Commissionaire zones covering all its 75 districts.

Football is bringing positive social changes in the society, as Chhattisgarh’s naxalite hit Bastar has been a witness to how arrival of national football competitions in Narainpur has slowly started to infuse cultural and social changes in the region, similar to what Assam’s Kokrajhar has experienced since last 2 years with the arrival of national football in the Bodo land.

Historically, Hyderabad has an inherent football legacy of 1950s to 80s, when the Hyderabad City Police team was a household name and the ever-inspiring bravery of legendary SA Rahim who not only excelled on the field but also had an illustrious career as India’s coach. The twin cities of Hyderabad and Secundrabad held a pride of place in Indian football having six footballers captaining Indian team, including SK Azizuddin, Dronacharya and Arjuna awardee Syed Nayeemuddin, Shahid Wasim, Mohammed Habib, Dhyanchand awardee Shabbir Ali and Victor Amalraj.

If Kolkata then was known as the mecca-of-football in India, Hyderabad had equally commanded the same respect in Indian football. And today, this city with its historic significance is once again ready to reverberate football in the region.





827 fields, 18 stadiums for football: UP will be football hub – Yogi Adityanath

The maiden Kolkata Derby in Lucknow's KD Singh Babu Stadium on Monday, September 2, 2024, proved to be a truly historic occasion for football in the state as the honourable Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Shri Yogi Adityanath, made a series of announcements that would go a long way in boosting the sport in the country's largest populated state.

As two of Indian football's traditional rivals, Mohun Bagan and East Bengal, fought it out on the pitch much to the delight of the spectators present, Shri Adityanath assured the state government would do everything to take football to the next level in UP.

As the first step, the Government of UP under Shri Adityanath has announced the plan to build 18 football stadiums across the 18 commissariats in the State. To give the beautiful game a further boost, the honourable Chief Minister has expressed that 827 football grounds will also be prepared in every blocks, across the state to ensure adequate football facilities in the state, which will encourage hosting of more tournaments.

All India Football Federation President Shri Kalyan Chaubey said before the Derby match in Lucknow in the presence of the honourable Chief Minister: "On August 8, I had the privilege of meeting you (the UP CM). After realising your love and dedication towards football, I made a request to you. I said a match like Derby if played in Lucknow, it will help toward the growth of football in UP. But having a good stadium to host the match could be a problem. But to my great surprise, the Government of UP took only 19 days to renovate the KD Singh Babu Stadium for the big occasion. This is a matter of great pleasure for every football lover in the city of Lucknow."

Addressing the public at the stadium, Shri Adityanath said, "I would like to extend my heartfelt welcome to the teams of Mohun Bagan SG and East Bengal FC on behalf of the Uttar Pradesh government and its people. It is of great importance to us that this prestigious match is being played in our state's capital, Lucknow for the first time. The Khelo India initiative, championed by PM Narendra Modi, has been a key driver of sports in India and inspired by his vision, UP has aligned itself with the mission."

"When I met Shri Chaubey three weeks ago, he wished for a stage to popularise football in Uttar Pradesh and said that the process could be sped up should the sport receive the government's support."

"I express my gratitude to the UP CM on behalf of the AIFF," said Shri Chaubey.



Intercontinental Cup: Legacy returns to Hyderabad

Results aside, the big positive from the tournament was international football returning to Hyderabad after 16 years

AKHIL RAWAT

It was a difficult start to the Manolo Márquez era in the Indian men's national team. A 0-3 defeat to Syria on Monday after a goalless draw versus Mauritius last week meant that the Blue Tigers ended the Intercontinental Cup 2024 in third place.

After what was a drab affair against Mauritius, which left Márquez unimpressed, India put on a better offensive showing against 93-ranked Syria, but only in the second half. The Spaniard was rather displeased by his men's panicky display in the opening minutes, which ultimately cost India as they were made to chase the game from start to finish after conceding as early as the seventh minute. Although India came out rejuvenated after the break, they couldn't breach the Syrian fortress and their debutant goalkeeper Elias Hadaya. But Márquez was at least pleased with the fact that his side created more in attack in those 45 minutes than they did in the previous three halves of football combined.

"It was a difficult tournament in all aspects. The team is not ready physically. All our players are in pre-season. Physically and technically, Syria were better. Against Mauritius, the game was very equal. At least today, it's true that the second half was okay. We deserved to score a goal. Three-nil isn't a fair reflection at all," said Márquez after the defeat to Syria.

"The second half was the only positive. Against Mauritius, we didn't play a good game, and in the first half of this game, the team was very scared, especially in the first few minutes."

Requiring only a draw to win the tournament, Syria were happy to preserve their one-goal advantage and play on the counter. India put all their eggs in one basket and went all out to get the elusive goal. Twice the crossbar came to Syria's rescue, while some brave defending from Syria and Hadaya's strong goalkeeping display prevented the first India goal of the Márquez era. As such, a clinical and quick Syria punished the hosts with two more goals late on, with a combination of Mahmoud Al-Mawas and Pablo Sabbag's fresh legs nailing the third and final goal.

"We knew that Syria's strong point was the counter-attack. We were losing 0-1 at half-time, and we knew that we needed to take the risk. We also knew that they could kill the game like they did in the last 15 minutes. But I think that from half-time till the 30th minute of the second half, the performance was okay. We had some clear chances to equalise in the game," said Márquez.

"Syria were better than us. Most of their players have already started the season with their clubs. They are in their fourth or fifth game in the championship that they are playing. And we are still in pre-season and we need to keep going because this is the only way that I know," he added.





Results kept aside, the big positive from the Intercontinental Cup was football returning to Hyderabad, a city with a rich legacy of the beautiful game, after 16 years. The last time the Blue Tigers played in Hyderabad was in the 2008 AFC Challenge Cup. Approximately 16 crore rupees were invested by the Government of Telangana to renovate the GMC Balayogi Gachibowli Stadium to make it a FIFA-standard match venue. The honourable Chief Minister Shri A Revanth Reddy, a huge sports lover, extended all necessary help for the successful conduct of the Intercontinental Cup. From new dressing rooms, officials' rooms to 18 thousand new bucket seats, the stadium was renovated from all aspects. And the new seats did not go unused in the tournament, with an average attendance of over 18 thousand for India's matches.

Next on the agenda for Márquez and the Blue Tigers is the tri-nation friendly tournament in Vietnam in October. India will face the hosts on October 9 and Lebanon on October 12, both higher-ranked sides, at the Thiên Trường Stadium in the city of Nam Định. The new Indian Super League season is only three days away, beginning on September 13. The league will take a break for the next FIFA International Match Window from October 6. Márquez expects the physical condition of his men to be better for the next trip as it will be in the middle of the domestic season.

"Obviously, I think every coach wants to train more. It's difficult when you don't have too many training sessions. I said earlier that we need to find the correct group of players to adapt to our idea. This is the target because the ISL will start now and we will see how the players are. We need to keep going after a defeat. I know it's difficult, but the only solution is to keep working," he said.





More goals, more match time: Kiyan Nassiri determined to gleam in Blue Tigers shirt

The 23-year-old earned his first national team camp call-up in the Intercontinental Cup

SOUOMO GHOSH

Kiyan Nassiri is a man on a mission. One where he strives to take the next step, no matter how big or small he is. However, while he endeavours to push forward, Nassiri is not averse to the idea of carpe diem. The 23-year-old forward has just had his first national team call-up as the Blue Tigers fight for the Intercontinental Cup in Hyderabad.

"I'm just happy to be here, honestly. It's my first camp, and I was very excited when my name came up," said Nassiri. "If the coach feels the time is right to give me my first cap, I'll be ready to take it. But even if it doesn't come, I just want to enjoy training with the 25 best players in the country. If I work hard, there will be more chances ahead."

While Nassiri is new to the national team environment, there are plenty of familiar faces to make him feel at home.

“When I first came to the camp, I thought maybe not going to be as familiar an experience. But I realised very quickly that I’m gelling with the boys in the team,” said Nassiri. “Even those who I’ve known as my rivals from other clubs all these years come around to help you in every little way you can imagine. It’s a very special environment. I am very happy that it’s like this.”

Nassiri started his journey in his hometown Kolkata in Mohammedan Sporting as a teenager, before moving to Mohun Bagan, where he spent the last five years. While he burst onto the scene in the ISL in 2022 with a hat-trick against arch-rivals East Bengal, the youngster has to deal with a lot more expectations on his shoulders than one would normally think.

He hails from what would be considered footballing royalty in Kolkata, his father Jamshid Nassiri being considered one of the greats of East Bengal and Mohammedan Sporting in the 1980s. However, that pressure is something that Nassiri is used to by now.

“People are always putting pressure on me because of the family I am from. ‘You know your father has done this, your father has done that’. But I never let it affect me. I am trying to find my own rhythm. I won’t say I’m trying to do that. I’ve been doing that my whole life,” he said.

“I realise that there are a lot of scenarios where people don’t take the same path as their parents, but this is what I’ve always wanted to do, so I’m just happy to be doing this,” said Nassiri. “This is the only path I’ve known, and I really couldn’t tell you what I would have done if I had to ditch plan A and go with plan B.”



Nassiri is, however, well on track in plan A, and is looking forward to the steps that follow his first national team call-up.

“My first goal after the last few years in the ISL would have been to be in the national camp, and I have achieved that now. I did not really expect the call-up in this window, but I’m just happy that I came,” he said. “Now that the first step is done, the second step is to get my debut, and then to do well from thereon,” he said.

The 23-year-old, however, showed great maturity and patience in charting the next steps of his journey. “It’s just about doing the best at what’s in front of me. Right now, we want to have a successful Intercontinental Cup, whether I get my debut or not,” he said.

Should the debut not come in the current international window, Nassiri is all prepared to go back to his new club Chennaiyin FC, and slog it out for the next opportunity.

“I’ve just made a big switch in my club career. All these years, I’ve played from the comforts of my home in Kolkata, but I felt that it’s now time for me to get out of my familiar comfort zone and learn new things,” he said. “It’s a bit daunting to step out of your home for the first time, but I am focussed on working hard and improving myself.

“I need to score more goals, provide more assists, and do well collectively at a club level to get more shots at international football,” said Nassiri.





SAFF U20 C'ship an eye-opener for India on eve of Laos campaign

It was a testing time for India in Kathmandu as their permutations and combinations didn't take them beyond the semi-finals after back-to-back wins in the group stage

SOUMO GHOSH

Two wins followed by a defeat in the semi-finals was the crux of India's not-too-successful SAFF U-20 Championship campaign in Nepal last month. A semi-final defeat on penalties at the hands of Bangladesh dashed India's hopes of defending their U-20 SAFF title.

With the tournament being played under damp conditions in Kathmandu, India, who had had their preparatory camp in Goa, looked to quickly adjust to their surroundings.

Despite the initial struggles, India finished top of Group B, defeating both Bhutan and Maldives by a 1-0 margin, courtesy a goal in each match by Monirul Molla and Manglenthang Kipgen, respectively.

Suspensions, however, kept plaguing India throughout the tournament. Centreback Pramveer and playmaker Vanlalpeka Guite were sent off against Bhutan for an off-the-ball incident, while Molla's two bookings in the group stage meant that the striker was suspended in their semi-final clash against Bangladesh.



While India could not execute their free-flowing gameplay in the first two matches, the semi-final, despite the defeat, was a different story. The Blue Colts, now supposedly acclimatised to the local conditions, had finally begun playing the way they actually wanted.

Bangladesh, however, were resolute. Asadul Molla's 36th minute strike gave the 2020 finalists the early lead, but India kept plugging away at them, and eventually captain Rickey Meetei equalled the score with a 75th minute strike, sending the match into the penalty shootouts, where they lost 3-4.

For India, losing their SAFF campaign is not the end of the road. The U20s have the AFC U-20 Asian Cup qualifiers coming up, where they will face Mongolia (September 25), I.R. Iran (September 27), and hosts Laos (September 29).

India head coach Ranjan Chaudhuri remains positive of the team's chances: "Our boys played extremely well, especially against Bangladesh. We dominated the ball and created so many chances. But it was just a matter of having a bad day, which can happen sometimes.

"We just need to brush this aside, take the positives from this tournament, and push on to the Asian qualifiers," he said. "We've missed a lot of chances, so that's the area that we clearly need to work on. It was a massive lesson for us, and we will certainly take it in the right way."



Manglenthang Kipgen: A valuable addition to limited game time

The MVP of the 2023 SAFF U19 Championship, Kipgen was a silver lining in India's rather disappointing SAFF U20 campaign this year

SOUOMO GHOSH

On Friday, August 23, 2024, the sparse crowd at the ANFA Complex in Kathmandu, Nepal, waited and waited and finally got to watch what a fan generally wants to in a game of football. A goal!

The spectators' patience was eventually rewarded deep into the add-on time of the second half. In the 95th minute, substitute Manglenthang Kipgen stole the ball from Adam Shiyaan and placed it in the bottom corner with a brilliant left-footer to hand India a 1-0 victory and send them into the semi-finals of the SAFF U20 Championship 2024 with an all-win record in the group.

It was certainly not something that the football lovers of Kathmandu hadn't seen before. Just about a year ago, in the SAFF U19 Championships, Kipgen would not have struck most as a player who would get many minutes on the pitch. In fact, he did not start in any match and clocked only 82 minutes on the pitch in the entire tournament. The lack of game time could hardly deter Kipgen from proving his mettle. The youngster maximised whatever time he had on the pitch, even scoring a brace in the final, a 3-0 victory against Pakistan. In the end, he was adjudged the tournament's Most Valuable Player.

Kipgen's fortunes have not changed much, it seems, when it comes to getting a spot in the starting eleven. However, the 19-year-old carries on with his remarkable Sisyphian attitude.

"I just want to play. Every time I see that I'm not in the starting XI, it just makes me more hungry to perform and make it there," said Kipgen. "I just want to play as much as possible, and I want to play good football. It's never about getting awards like the MVP."

The teenager, who hails from the Zalenphai village in the Kangpokpi district in Manipur, once shared his family's dream of becoming an IAS officer as a kid, but soon found himself seduced by the beautiful game.

"My parents wanted me to be an IAS officer, and I also had that dream, but when I got a little older, I started playing football, and after a point, that was all I wanted to do," he laughed. "I used to daydream of a life where I would not have to go to school and just play football all day, no matter what."

"We used to play barefoot back then, even on grounds that had stones, but none of that mattered. It did not matter, be it sun or rain," Kipgen recalled. "Barefoot football in the rain was emancipating. I miss it these days."

"Of course, I want to play full matches, but again, it's the decision of the coaches. I just want to make the best of whatever opportunity I get," he said.





A victory against Indonesia a fulfilling experience, says U17 head coach Ishfaq Ahmed

India U17 men's team played two friendlies in Indonesia in preparation for the SAFF U17 Championship later this month

AKHIL RAWAT

The India U17 men's team have returned to their base in Srinagar after a satisfactory tour of Indonesia, where the Blue Colts recorded a win in their second and last friendly match after losing the opener against the hosts. Head coach Ishfaq Ahmed is happy to have a couple of international matches under their belt ahead of the SAFF U17 Championship and the AFC U17 Asian Cup Qualifiers.

After going down 1-3 to the Indonesian national U17 team on August 25, India responded with an improved showing, winning 1-0 in the second friendly on August 27 thanks to Brahmacharimayum Sumit Sharma's goal.

"I am happy that we got these kinds of matches against a good-quality Asian team. The Indonesian age-group teams are doing wonderful recently. Just a few days ago, their U20s beat Argentina 2-1. That shows their quality in football. We wanted to compete against an opposition like that," said Ahmed.

"Our players were able to compare and see for themselves what's the intensity of matches at this level. This was the first time this batch played some international friendlies and for the players and me, as a coach, it's an eye-opener on what kind of opponents we'll get in the Asian Cup Qualifiers. We need to have such competitive matches if we want to improve."

Reflecting on what went wrong in the first loss, Ahmed observed that his boys weren't comfortable on the pitch and struggled to settle in the new environment. For almost the entire squad, it was their first-ever match outside the Indian subcontinent. India were made to chase from the get-go after trailing via an early penalty. While Levis Zangminlun's goal reduced the deficit in the second half, Indonesia proved too strong in the end and ran out 3-1 winners in Bali.

"I think we were nervous in the first game. Some of the boys were playing an international match for the first time. They got in their shell and didn't perform as per expectations. Indonesia, on the other hand, had played against the likes of Australia and Vietnam in the ASEAN U16 Championship before that. We took time to adjust away from home against a quality team. To be honest, we did create plenty of chances in that game, we could've even taken the lead but that's okay. We did a lot of work after the first loss. The boys need to understand what we can afford and what we can't because the margin of error in these kinds of matches is very small," explained Ahmed.



However, the story of the second match panned out quite differently. India aimed to take control from the start and held possession. Sumit Sharma's header from a corner proved to be the solitary goal, earning the Blue Colts a deserved win.

"I am glad the boys were more confident in the second match. I only made one change due to an injury, bringing on Yaipharemba (Chingkhambam) in place of Usham (Thoungamba). All our substitutes in the second half also did quite well. We received praises from their coach and the local media too. For us, it was a learning curve and a reality check," said Ahmed.

While India created plenty of opportunities in both games, the defence remained watertight in the second one, which wasn't the case in the first owing to poor defensive shape. Credit also goes to goalkeeper Aheibam Suraj Singh who pulled off some magnificent saves in one-on-one situations in both matches.

"One of the major problems of the first match was that we weren't in a proper shape, which is important in these matches. But we maintained it better in the second game. We kept it simple. Still, I believe we could've done more. Probably, we should've scored at least one or two more goals. We had some really good chances," said Ahmed.

"Overall, I am happy. We had a tactical discussion after dissecting the first match and on the things which went wrong and what we could've done better. We matched them physically. Still, there were a few mistakes but that's normal if we play against such quality teams. All in all, it was a much improved performance in the second game. We ended with a fantastic away win. Beating Indonesia at their home is not easy," he elaborated.

Before the trip to Indonesia, Ahmed stated that the target was to judge where they stand as a team, with competitive matches on the horizon, most importantly, the AFC U17 Asian Cup Qualifiers. For now, India's focus shifts to defending their SAFF U17 Championship crown in Thimphu next month.

"We will now also prepare for a plan B. We want to keep a reserve plan ready with a different formation. We want to keep the players match fit, and give chances to those who didn't get minutes in Indonesia," said Ahmed.





Mohun Bagan SG clinch derby honours in Lucknow clash of titans

Mohun Bagan emerged victorious on penalties in the Chief Minister's Cup charity derby match against East Bengal FC on Monday, September 2, 2024, at the KD Singh Babu Stadium in Lucknow.

After Suhail Ahmad Bhat's first-half goal was cancelled out by Muhammed Ashique K's second-half leveller, the Green and Maroon Brigade nicked a 3-2 win on penalties to claim the first ever Kolkata Derby in the City of Nawabs.

Mohun Bagan Super Giant started off all guns blazing and would've taken the lead in the first 19 seconds had Suhail Ahmad Bhat not been in an offside position before flicking a fine header into the back of the net. The Mariners were quick in their attacks and were able to find spaces through the middle rather easily in the opening minutes. In the eighth minute, Ningombam Engson Singh blasted his effort wide from a good position.

East Bengal's first real foray in the Mohun Bagan SG box came in the 15th minute when Hira Mondal made a mazy run to the by-line but he was stopped on his tracks by Raj Basfore.

Mohun Bagan SG's continued pressure paid off in the 18th minute when they took the lead from a set-piece. Salahuddeen Adnan K'S free-kick landed on the feet of an unmarked Suhail, who punted a perfect side-footed volley past the outstretched gloves of Aditya Patra.



Salahudheen could've doubled the lead when he was released in plenty of space in the box but his shot lacked power and Patra made an easy collection.

East Bengal were able to reduce the tempo of Mohun Bagan SG's attacks and kept more possession of the ball towards the end of the half, but their lack of creativity in the final third was evident.

Mohun Bagan started off stronger after the restart as well, with two good opportunities falling their way early on. Loitongbam Taison Singh's free-kick from just over 20 yards missed the target by a few inches. In the 53rd minute, the winger made a brilliant run on the right and cut it across the face of goal for Engson, who ballooned his shot over from merely eight yards out.

That glaring miss would come back to haunt Mohun Bagan SG as East Bengal bagged the equalising goal in the 71st minute. Tanmay Das rolled a low ball in the middle of the box for Muhammed Ashique K, and the substitute took a touch before poking the ball through a crowd of legs and into the bottom corner to make it 1-1.

In the penalty shoot-out, Mohun Bagan SG converted three of their kicks via Serto Worneilen Kom, Adil Abdulla and Ravi Bahadur Rana. Despite Aditya Patra saving two penalties and Ashique and Chiku Mandi scoring for East Bengal, it wasn't enough as Tanmay Das, Vishnu PV and Muhammed Musharaf failed to convert.



Mohammedan Sporting triumph in charity tie for noble cause

The 2023-24 I-League champions Mohammedan Sporting Club played a charity match against the Super League Kerala All-Star XI at the Payyanad Stadium in Manjeri on Friday, August 30, 2024. The All India Football Federation was involved in organising the match.

The event aimed to raise funds for the victims of the recent landslides in Wayanad, with all proceeds directed towards the Chief Minister's Disaster Relief Fund (CMDRF). Mohammedan Sporting won the match 2-1. The match also symbolises the unity football brings, especially in challenging times.

Present on the occasion were AIFF President Shri Kalyan Chaubey, AIFF Vice President Mr. NA Haris, AIFF Secretary General Mr. Anilkumar and Kerala Football Association President Mr. Navas Meeran.

During half-time, Shri Chaubey announced that the AIFF would assign an expert team to renovate the Payyanad Stadium. He also praised the performance of both teams and commended the spirit of the football fans, highlighting the vibrant atmosphere created by the community's support for the event.

Mr Meeran announced that the Malappuram District Football Association has donated ₹1 lakh to the Chief Minister's Disaster Relief Fund (CMDRF). In recognition of their contributions, the Super League Kerala presented mementos to Shri Chaubey.



Mohammedan Sporting started the game with aggressive attacking moves, but All-Star XI built a strong defensive wall to withstand the pressure in the initial minutes. The breakthrough came in the 21st minute when Mohammedan's Lalremsanga scored the match's first goal.

However, just four minutes later, the All-Star XI striker Kervens Belfort converted a penalty to equalise, causing the gallery to erupt in celebration.

Mohammedan Sporting found the net again in the second half, scoring the winning goal through Ghanaian midfielder Mohammed Kadiri. A highlight of the match was the appearance of Indian football legend IM Vijayan, who came on as a substitute for the SLK All-Star XI.

(With inputs from Super League Kerala press release)



Outstanding Odisha FC secure AFC Women's Champions League Group Stage berth

The Juggernauts beat Jordanian side Etihad Club and Singapore's Lion City Sailors FC to take their maiden continental journey to the group stage

With a perfect record of two wins in two, Odisha FC shone on the continental stage by topping their preliminary stage group in the 2024-25 AFC Women's Champions League at the Prince Mohammed Stadium in Zarqa, Jordan. The Juggernauts, marking their international debut, won 4-1 against Lion City Sailors FC (Singapore) before notching a hard-fought 2-1 win against hosts Etihad Club (Jordan) on Saturday, August 31, to qualify for the Group Stage of Asia's elite women's club competition.

The reigning Indian Women's League champions made the perfect start against their Singaporean counterparts with a dominating 4-1 conquest, powered by a brace from 19-year-old Lynda Kom Serto and two own goals. The Indian youth international striker first scored with an instinctive header before converting Pyari Xaxa's pass with a first-time finish. The recently-named AIFF Emerging Women's Player of the Year, Neha Sillay, impressed on her Odisha FC debut, with her surging runs down the left wing and accurate crosses causing plenty of trouble for the opponents.

With Etihad Club winning 5-0 against Lion City Sailors in the next match, Odisha FC required nothing less than three points against the Jordanian champions to qualify from the group. Expectedly, it started as a close contest but the Juggernauts managed to take a 1-0 lead at half-time thanks to Jennifer Kankam Yeboah's 27th-minute goal after she was released in space by Neha.

However, Etihad Club found the equaliser in the 57th minute via Jordan's all-time top-scorer Maysa Jbarah, who scored with a left-footed strike into the bottom corner. But Odisha FC were not to be denied. They found their second goal in the 70th minute, with Lynda picking out Yeboah, who took advantage of an error in judgement by the Etihad goalkeeper, before slotting it into the back of an empty net. The Juggernauts defended in numbers for the remaining 20 minutes. Indian international custodian Shreya Hooda also made a couple of remarkable saves in the dying minutes to see off the win and cap off a historic night in Indian women's football.

In the Group Stage of the AFC Women's Champions League, Odisha FC will travel to Vietnam to face Urawa Red Diamonds Ladies (Japan), Taichung Blue Whale Women's Football Team (Chinese Taipei), and hosts Ho Chi Minh City Women's FC (Vietnam). The Group Stage comprises three groups of four teams and will also be contested in a centralised league format from October 6 to 12.

The top two finishers of each group and the two best third-placed sides will progress to the Quarter-finals, to be played on March 22 and 23, 2025. A Knockout Stage draw will be conducted prior to the Quarter-finals to determine the four pairings, which will be contested in a single-leg format, with the higher-ranked team of each tie to serve as the home side.

This will be followed by a centralised Finals, which will see the Semi-finals and Final – all single-leg ties – being played out from May 21 to 24, 2025, to determine the first ever champions of the AFC Women's Champions League.





Spectacular start to Super League Kerala Season One

The inaugural edition of the highly anticipated Super League Kerala (SLK) kicked off with an electrifying match between Forca Kochi FC and Malappuram FC at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium in Kochi on Saturday, September 7, 2024. The Super League Trophy was also revealed in the inaugural function.

The event was elevated by the presence of film actors and club owners Prithviraj and Asif Ali, along with many other honorary guests who graced the first thrilling match-up that was won 2-0 by Malappuram FC. The All India Football Federation Secretary General, Mr. Anilkumar was present.

Both Kochi and Malappuram fans welcomed their favourite players with enthusiastic chants and vibrant tifos, creating an electrifying atmosphere that resonated throughout the stadium. The opening ceremony captivated fans, featuring Bollywood star Jacqueline Fernandez alongside renowned music artists Stephan Devassy, Shivamani, Dabzee, DJ Savyo, and DJ Sekhar.

The Super League Kerala, featuring six franchises from across the state, aims to revive the football spirit in Kerala and provide a platform for local talent to shine alongside international stars. The matches are scheduled in Kochi, Kozhikode, Malappuram, and Thiruvananthapuram.

(With inputs from SLK Media Team)



Manipur champions of Sub Jr Girls' NFC Tier 1

Manipur's dominance in women's football is unrelenting; no matter what the age-group is. In May last season, Manipur brooked no defence to win the 28th Senior Women's National Football Championship for Rajmata Jijabai Trophy in Kolkata, their 22nd title.

In August, the state's junior girls travelled to Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh to play the Junior Girls' National Football Championship 2024-25 Tier 1 and duly returned home with the trophy after registering a fluent 2-0 victory Jharkhand in the final.

The northeast state's red hot form in women's football didn't stop here. Less than a month later, the sub-junior girls added another cup to their already overcrowded trophy cabinet when they won the Sub-Junior Girls' National Football Championship 2024-25 Tier 1 title in Berhampore, West Bengal. The rivals once again were Jharkhand, who were not to be tamed too easily, but finally succumbed to a 5-7 defeat.

The winners led 4-0 at half time, but just when it looked like a one-sided affair, Jharkhand came back in the second session to score five goals, though it wasn't enough to alter the course of the match. Manipur remained firmly in control and added three more goals to clinch the issue.

The match saw an early lead from Manipur when Laitonjam Linthoi Chanu scored in the fifth minute. Captain Julan Nongmaithem further extended the lead with two consecutive goals in the 15th and 34th minutes. Thoudam Malemnganbi Devi added another just before halftime, making it 4-0 for Manipur.

Jharkhand's Deepika Kumari displayed the first sign of a fightback by scoring in the 49th minute, but Manipur responded quickly with a goal from Thoudam in the 55th minute. Chingkhamayum Redima Devi then scored twice in the 66th and 73rd minutes, bringing Manipur's tally to 7.

Despite the deficit, Jharkhand fought back with substitute Swati Munda scoring two goals in the 74th and in the 90+6 minute. In between, Deepika Kumari added a goal in the 80th minute, and Sabrina Kumari scored in the 85th minute, but it wasn't enough to get the better of the ultimate champions.



Club Owners Express Confidence in AIFP's Open-Arm Approach in Rebuilding I-League

We will take all corrective measures to ensure I-League is given the time and space to grow in the coming years, says AIFP President Kalyan Chaubey

The I-League Task Force Committee, comprising of its club owners and senior officials on Saturday, September 7, 2024 unanimously expressed their confidences in the leadership of All India Football Federation President Sh. Kalyan Chaubey in laying a foundation for an inclusive growth to pave way for a robust League structure for future.

In a meeting chaired by AIFP President in Delhi, the Task Force Committee representatives, namely Mr. Pradhyum Reddy (Dempo SC), Mr. Shamsher Singh (Namdhari FC), Mr. Ranjit Bajaj (Delhi FC) and Mr. Kishore S Reddy (SC Bengaluru) present in-person at the Football House, hailed AIFP's efforts in allowing club's equal representation in formalizing League's strategy. Saturday's meeting was a third-in-line, within last 30 days in the run up to the start of the season in October.



Says **Mr. Uday Singh, Owner, Namdhari FC**, "The AIFF has addressed all the I-League clubs' concerns and made significant progress in today's meeting. The clubs are confident that, with ongoing cooperation from AIFF, this year's edition will be the best in recent years. Discussions highlighted the crucial role of broadcasters for the league's survival. Following this meeting, participants feel positive about securing I-League broadcasts. We extend our special thanks to the President for meeting with us in Delhi on a public holiday and request continued support and cooperation."

By mid-September, the I-League Task Force Committee will present its comprehensive reports and proposals for final planning on key factors comprising Venue Infrastructure, Broadcast specifications and budget, Fixtures and Marketing.

Says **Mr. Ranjit Bajaj**, "For the first time we feel the I-League belongs to the clubs as much as its' AIFFs'. There is a sense of ownership among us as well. We are aware that it's not an overnight job, but as a club owner and member of the Task Force Committee, I welcome the open-arm approach and transparency adopted by AIFF."

Commenting on it, **Sh. Kalyan Chaubey said**, "I'm glad to see the I-League Task Force Committee's progress since last we met on 12 August. With the onset of current season, we are on a rebuilding exercise where active participation of each of the I-League club is paramount in redefining the future. We will take all corrective measures to ensure I-League is given the time and space to grow in the coming years."

Clubs present virtually in the meeting : **Mr. Habamutlang Lyngdoh (Shillong Lajong FC), Mr. Aditya Barros Pereira (Churchill Brothers), Dr. KT Mahhe and Mr. Fabio Ferreira (Sreenidi Deccan FC), Mr. K.K. Tak and Mr. Kamal Kishore (Rajasthan United FC), Mr. Arshad Shawl (Real Kashmir FC), Mr. Hmingthana Zadeng (Aizawl FC), Mr. Bhaskar Basu and Mr. Prithijit Das (Inter Kashi), Mr. VC Praveen (Gokulam Kerala FC) and AIFF Secretary General Mr. Anilkumar P., while Deputy Secretary General Mr. M Satyanarayan** attended in-person.



STATE OF AFFAIRS

Eight northeast states vow to take football further ahead

Representatives from the eight states in the northeast region met in Shillong, Meghalaya, earlier this week as the city celebrated its love for football with the Durand Cup 2024 semi-final between Shillong Lajong FC and NorthEast United FC with a common objective of chalking out detailed plans of helping the game grow further in the region.

The meeting was attended by the Presidents, Secretaries and senior officials of eight states – Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim and Tripura.

Speaking about the meet, AIFF Treasurer and Arunachal Pradesh Football Association Secretary, Mr. Kipa Ajay, said: “It is our aim to help grow football in the northeast region through cooperation and communication. We had fruitful discussions on different aspects like grassroots programmes, development of women’s football, and spreading beach soccer and futsal to different areas.

“Everyone agreed that football events could be held during the different festivals that are held locally in the region,” he said. The officials also discussed the possibility of resuming the Dr. T. Ao Football Tournament, which was discontinued after the COVID-19 pandemic.



Cast of 10 set for I-League 3 Play-offs

The Play-offs will be held in Naihati and Kalyani, where four teams will be promoted to the 2024-25 I-League 2

After 50 matches in five venues across India in the 2024-25 I-League 3 Group Stage - the second season of the fourth-tier league - 10 teams have made their way into the Final Round of the competition.

Diamond Harbour FC (Group A winners), SAT Tirur (Group A runners-up), Sesa FA (Group B winners), Dalbir FA (Group B runners-up), Chanmari FC (Group C winners), MYJ-GMSC (Group C runners-up), KLASA FC (Group D winners), Karbi Anglong Morning Star FC (Group D runners-up), Abbas Union FC (Group E winners) and Downtown Heroes FC (Group E runners-up) have qualified for the Final Round which will take place from September 25 to October 6, 2024.

Home favourites Diamond Harbour FC had a minor hiccup when they lost 1-2 to Sports Odisha, but apart from that, they powered through with convincing wins against Ghaziabad City FC, Lakecity FC and SAT Tirur to finish atop Group A. Naro Hari Shrestha's four goals were of much help for the Bengal side.

But to decide the group runners-up, there was nothing to separate SAT Tirur and Lakecity FC. Quite literally. The sides from Kerala and Madhya Pradesh drew 1-1 on the opening day, and were tied on goal difference and goals scored. As such, draw of lots remained the only option, where SAT Tirur got the nod. Retrospectively, Adheeb Basheer's 86th-minute strike against Diamond Harbour in their 2-4 loss turned out to be the all-important goal which took SAT Tirur through.

Group B was hosted in Goa and followed the trend of the hosts finishing in first place. Sesa FA may have made a slow start with back-to-back draws against Maharashtra Oranje FC and Kerala United FC, but narrow 2-1 wins over both Garhwal Heroes FC and Dalbir FA proved enough to top the group. Sesa will be joined by Dalbir FA in the final round, who also started off on the wrong foot with a 0-3 loss to Kerala United, but back-to-back wins over Garhwal Heroes and Maharashtra Oranje guaranteed the Punjab side a top two finish.

Chanmari FC were the only team to end the group stage with a perfect record of four wins. The Aizawl side topped Group C, scoring 12 goals, with six of them coming against RKM FA. Vincent Lalduhawma and MS Dawngliana did the bulk of the scoring, with four and three goals, respectively. There was a real tussle for second spot in the group, where MYJ-GMSC only managed to pip HAL SC on goal difference. On the last day, the Mumbai-based club required a big win over RKM and hoped for a defeat for HAL against Chanmari, and that's exactly how it all panned out. MYJ-GMSC did their job, coming from behind to thrash RKM 5-1, largely thanks to a hat-trick from Himanshu Patil, who also became the group stage top-scorer with six goals. HAL only required a draw against the hosts to seal second spot, but they fell short and lost 1-2, thus missing the chance to return to I-League 2 for the first time since the 2009-10 season.



Group D was characterised by free-scoring performances from KLASA FC, who netted 12, and hosts Karbi Anglong Morning Star FC, who scored 16, to finish first and second, respectively. Backed by their passionate home fans, who averaged an attendance of over 10,000 per game at the KASA Stadium in Diphu, Karbi Anglong Morning Star secured dominant wins over Mumbai Kenkre FC, Jaipur Elite FC and Bhuna FC to confirm Assam's representation in the final round. But it was KLASA FC, who remained unbeaten in all four games, including a come-from-behind 2-1 win over the hosts. Hence, the Manipur side progressed to the I-League 3 final round for the second year running. Mumbai Kenkre, who were relegated from I-League 2 last season and played in the I-League as recently as two seasons ago, could only finish in third spot.

In Group E, Downtown Heroes FC ensured that all group hosts progressed to the final round as they qualified in second spot after a hard-fought 2-2 draw against Southern Sporting Union in the last game. The Srinagar side had comprehensively beaten Abbas Union FC and Charutar Vidya Mandal FC in the first two matches. Telangana side Abbas Union recovered from the opening day loss to the hosts and went on a three-game winning and clean sheet streak to secure top spot in style.

2024-25 I-League 3 Play-offs Draw

Group A: Diamond Harbour FC, Sesa FA, KLASA FC, Karbi Anglong Morning Star FC, Downtown Heroes FC

Group B: Abbas Union FC, Chanmari FC, SAT Tirur, Dalbir FA, MYJ-GMSC

The matches will be played in a single round-robin format in each group. The top two teams from each group will be promoted to the 2024-25 I-League 2. The teams finishing in third place in both groups will be promoted to the 2025-26 I-League 2. The two group winners will play a one-off final to determine the 2024-25 I-League 3 champions.





Group Stage draw revealed for 29th Sr Women's NFC for Rajmata Jijabai Trophy

The draw for the group stage of the 29th Senior Women's National Football Championship for Rajmata Jijabai Trophy 2024-25 was conducted at the Football House, on Monday, September 2, 2024. Manipur are the defending champions after defeating Haryana in last season's final in Kolkata. Present in the draw was AIFF Secretary General Mr Anilkumar. Representatives of the state associations attended the draw virtually.

A total of 31 teams - excluding last season's finalists Manipur and Haryana, who have received a bye to the Final Round - were drawn into seven groups of four and one group of three. The eight best-performing teams, excluding the finalists, from last season's Final Round are the top seeds for the 2024-25 edition. The top seeded teams - Tamil Nadu, West Bengal, Railways, Delhi, Punjab, Odisha, Sikkim, and Jharkhand - were assigned into Groups A to H, respectively. All the remaining participating teams were placed in an open pot and drawn sequentially into Group A to H.

The eight group winners will join Manipur and Haryana in the Final Round, where they will be drawn into two groups of five teams each. The top two teams from each group will qualify for the semi-finals.

Group Stage Draw for the 29th Senior Women's National Football Championship for Rajmata Jijabai Trophy 2024-25:

Group A: Tamil Nadu, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Goa

Group B: West Bengal, Karnataka, Jammu & Kashmir, Bihar

Group C: Railways, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Assam

Group D: Delhi, Maharashtra, Pondicherry, Andaman & Nicobar

Group E: Punjab, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand

Group F: Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Ladakh

Group G: Sikkim, Chandigarh, Tripura, Gujarat

Group H: Jharkhand, Telangana, Mizoram



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