

# UB group lends support to Kolkata's big duo

NEW DELHI/ KOLKATA /MARGAO/ MUMBAI, 27 MAY: Mahindra Group may have decided to disband their I-League club but United Breweries, sponsors of East Bengal and Mohun Bagan, said they would continue their support for the two Kolkata giants.

Mr Fraser Castellino, chief operating officer of sports marketing business of UB Group, conceded that I-League does not provide profitable returns to the corporates but indicated there was no immediate plan to withdraw their sponsorship. "It is unfortunate that Mahindra United has decided to shut down. I can't comment as I don't have the facts. I-League has to be changed to make it a business proposition.

"The All India Football Federation should understand that corporates expect return to their investment," said Castellino in New Delhi today. "We are not getting the kind of return that we expect but we remain optimistic that things will change in I-League," he added.

Castellino denied UB group chairman Mr Vijay Mallya was involved in any plan of start-

ing an Indian Premier League-style football league, along with IPL side Rajasthan Royals co-owner Mr Raj Kundra.

"It was just an idea. Nothing beyond that," he said. I-League chief executive Mr Sunando Dhar said it was unfortunate for Mahindra to shut shop but said other corporate houses are on the line to own teams. "Some corporates are talking to us to own franchisee teams and these teams would feature in 2011-12 I-League. "So, it is a case of loss of a Mahindra but other corporates coming in," he said. "We are going for a structural change of the I-League from 2011-12.

"We are working with sponsors and broadcasters to package and market the I-League in a better way," he said, adding: "no team, however big its reputation might be, will not be allowed to take part from 2011-12 season if they do not comply with the Asian Football Confederation professional criteria.

"If the clubs don't conform to AFC criteria till 31 December 2010, they will not be allowed to play in I-League from next season (2011-12).

The message is please shape up or else shut shop. The AIFF president mr Praful Patel and AFC chief Mr Mohammad bin Hammam is serious about this," he said.

## East Bengal end with a draw

East Bengal were forced to settle for a 1-1 draw against Viva Kerala at home in their ultimate I-League encounter today.

Elsewhere, already crowned champions, Dempo played out 1-1 draw against Pune FC at home while Mahindra United defeated JCT 2-1 in their concluding I-League encounter in Mumbai today. Shillong Lajong FC will look to avoid relegation when they face Salgaocar away at Margao tomorrow.

Sporting Club de Goa pipped hosts Mohun Bagan by higher goal difference to enter the final of the U-19 tournament for the I-League teams today.

Sporting Clube held Mohun Bagan to a 1-1 draw before making it to the final for having scored more goals in the final equation. **PTI**