



National booters report at the BFF Bhaban on Thursday for the national camp that starts today.

PHOTO: STAR

Reebok ropes in Bashar, Ashraful

SPORTS REPORTER

National cricket captain Habibul Bashar and his colleague Mohammed Ashraful have signed three-year contracts with sports equipment manufacturer Reebok last week.

The two national cricketers, who will receive handsome sponsorship amount from the deal, will use cricket gear and clothing of Reebok during this period.

When contacted Bashar admitted the fact but did not disclose any financial details.

Nat'l soccer kicks off today

SPORTS REPORTER

The qualifying rounds of the Jubok Phone 23rd National Football Championship begins today at the Padma zone with hosts Shariatpur taking on Faridpur in the opening match.

The match will kick off at the Shariatpur Stadium at 3.45pm. Bangladesh Football Federation president SA Sultan will declare the meet open.

A rally was brought in the town yesterday in connection of the tournament.

The other teams taking part in the knockout phase at Padma zone are Dhaka, Munshiganj, Gopalganj, Rajbari, Manikganj and Madaripur.

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Did U Know?

Germany is the only team to have been involved in four World Cup penalty shootouts, winning every one.



Roberto Donadoni

(Newly appointed Italy coach)

"Pressure is part of the job. I knew that when I decided to become a coach."

Joy persuaded to return

Football

SPORTS REPORTER

Arif Khan Joy could reconsider his decision to retire from international football for a short time, informed national coach Hassanuzzaman Babloo yesterday.

National captain Joy confirmed on Wednesday he would hang up his boots and is not going to join the national camp for the 2007 Asian Cup qualifier against Qatar.

However, Babloo persuaded the defensive midfielder to shelve his decision for the sake of the nation and seems to be successful in his attempt.

The camp starts today and Joy,

now busy in political activities in his area, is expected to join by July 24.

"I can demand this from him. He has played under me at under-16 and u-19 levels too. And as his coach for a long time, I pleaded to him not to desert me," Babloo told The Daily Star yesterday after most of the 20-member squad reported to the coach at the BFF Bhaban.

The team will prepare for their next qualifying match against Qatar, scheduled to be held on August 16.

"We are short of players because the youngsters are on duty for the SA Games. I have only five midfielders in the side and Joy is an essential member of the squad. There is no replacement for the crucial position.

"His skill and experience is very

much needed for the side as we will be up against a formidable team. Joy has understood the situation and agreed to join the camp as soon as he returns to Dhaka," added the former national winger.

Arman Mia has also announced he will not join the national camp and Babloo said he is trying to contact the playmaker.

"He is another midfielder we cannot afford to lose at this stage. But we have failed to locate him. I am hopeful that he will reconsider his decision like Joy," hoped Babloo.

Rajani Kanta Barman and Matiuur Munna have also yet to report as both are abroad. However, the team management expects the duo to return from India soon and join the camp.

2007 ASIAN CUP AFC rejects Chittagong as venue

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh might have to play both their home and away 2007 Asian Cup qualifiers against Qatar abroad after the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) has rejected Chittagong as a venue.

"The AFC has let us know that the MZ Aziz Stadium in Chittagong is below standard for Asian Cup match venue," said Bangladesh Football Federation general secretary Anwarul Hoque Helal yesterday.

Bangladesh are scheduled to play Qatar on August 16 at home and on September 5 in Doha.

The BFF cannot use the under-construction Bangabandhu National Stadium in Dhaka, which hosted the previous two qualifiers.

"We don't have any other alternative. So we have proposed the Qatar Football Association to host both the matches," said Helal.

"We've yet to get a response but if they agree, I'll request the AFC to permit us play both matches in Qatar with the gap between the matches reduced," he added.

It can be mentioned that the MA Aziz Stadium hosted the AFC Challenge Cup tournament in April but according to AFC, it lacks top facilities.

Younis takes to the field

AFP, London

Pakistan vice-captain Younis Khan handed his team a boost ahead of next week's second Test against England when he returned to action after a knee injury.

Younis, 28, missed the drawn first Test at Lord's last week but was back on the field for his country's four-day match against Northamptonshire, which began on Thursday.

If he comes through the game unscathed, Khan is certain to return to the Pakistan Test team at Old Trafford, Manchester on July 27.

Younis, who has scored five hundreds in his last 11 Tests, is captaining Pakistan at Northampton as coach Bob Woolmer rests several first-choice players including regular skipper Inzamamul Haq.

Woolmer said: "He is 100 per cent fit and will be back and firing, which is very good news for us."

Pakistan all-rounder Abdul Razzaq, leg-spinner Danish Kaneria and Lord's double-centurion Mohammad Yousuf all sit out the Northamptonshire warm-up.

Team manager Zaheer Abbas hinted leg-spinner Mushtaq Ahmed, currently playing county cricket in England with Sussex, could be called into the side at Old Trafford if the pitch looks like it will take spin.

The Pakistan Cricket Board has sanctioned his inclusion as an additional member of the touring party and Abbas said: "If we are going to call him for Old Trafford we have to play him."

"He has been playing here and has done very well so there is no need for him to get a game beforehand."

Mashud relishing challenge

Cricket

SPORTS REPORTER

The job of wicketkeeping in the country has almost become synonymous with Khaled Mashud. Like his nickname, the 30-year old cricketer has been devotedly acted as a "pilot" behind the stumps for the last decade.

One statistic would be good enough for anybody to understand the Rajshahi cricketer's indispensable involvement in Bangladesh cricket at the international level: He has so far played 41 Tests out of 44 apart from making 112 one-day appearances in 125 outings for the Tigers.

Although the former national captain's career has been dented by off the field affairs, Mashud's realm behind the stumps remains unquestionable and he has made some glorious contributions which to raise the country's profile.

There has been no doubt about his

supremacy as a keeper because no one has shown enough potential to challenge the fighter Mashud, who is widely respected for hard work and his commitment to the game.

It seems that the only way someone can snatch the gloves from him is by batting well as Mashud's recent batting form, both at domestic and international levels, brought him under scrutiny.

And the veteran cricketer is expected to be put to the test in the Zimbabwe-Kenya tour as the selectors have surprisingly included a second wicketkeeper, mind it for only eight games, and hinted at the possibility of trying young Mushfiqur Rahim.

Mashud, however, is little bothered and announces with confidence that he would not linger his stay in the national team if he feels that his time is over.

"I don't think my position in the team is at stake. I will definitely welcome if anybody throws a real challenge to me. Do you honestly think there is anybody who can

replace me now? Yes, there is a whispering about my position ahead of the tours but I am not worried," said Mashud.

"I want to clear one thing that I will not stay for a single day in the national team if everybody thinks that I have very little left to serve the side. I don't want to stay without respect. It's my lifelong dream to say goodbye international cricket with my head high," he added.

Mashud, who refused to make any comment on the selectors' decision to take two wicketkeepers for a comparatively relaxed trip.

"It is not my duty to comment on team selection. The selectors must have some plan and only they can say better. I think if any new boy is to be tested, it should have been done during a relatively easier home series against Kenya," said Mashud.

"However, you can't reach a conclusion about someone's potential after watching him against a team like Zimbabwe and Kenya because the real challenge

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Bangladesh wicketkeeper Khaled Mashud (L) is poised to take a catch from 'keeping coach Tim Coyle during a training session at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur on Wednesday.

PHOTO: STAR

Sachin back in India fold

Cricket

AFP, Mumbai

Sachin Tendulkar was on Thursday named in the Indian team for a tri-series in Sri Lanka in August, marking the star batsman's return to the circuit after five months off due to injury.

The August 14-29 limited-overs event in Colombo also featuring South Africa will be Tendulkar's first international outing since the first Test against England in Mumbai in March.

A shoulder injury, which required surgery in London in April, kept the 33-year-old out of the home one-day series against England and the recent tour of the

West Indies.

Tendulkar, one-day cricket's most successful batsman with 14,146 runs and 39 centuries, was an automatic selection after being declared fit by team physiotherapist John Gloster on Tuesday.

"Sachin was sure to be in the team once he was cleared," chairman of selectors Kiran More told reporters here.

"You can't have doubts about such a great player."

Tendulkar's return will boost India after Rahul Dravid's men suffered an embarrassing 4-1 defeat at the hands of Brian Lara's unfancied West Indies in May.

The selectors also recalled Dinesh Mongia after a gap of 15 months, rewarding the left-handed batsman and left-arm spinner for his consistent performance this season for English county Leicestershire.

Mongia, who played in the 2003 World Cup in South Africa where India reached the final, has so far scored 1,073 runs and claimed eight wickets in 51 matches.

He last played for India against Pakistan at New Delhi in April, 2005.

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Shooting best prospect

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh face the threat of returning without a single gold medal from next month's SA Games in Colombo, for the first time in the history of biennial event of the SAARC region.

Inclusion of Afghanistan saw the name of the SAF Games switch to SA Games two years ago when the ninth edition was held in Pakistan and lack of preparation is the reason why sports organisers are rather hopeless about success in the tenth version of the so-called Olympics of South Asia.

Never before Bangladesh have failed to win a gold medal and this time around, the whole contingent will look to the eight shooters picked up by Bangladesh National Shooting Federation.

Shooting is the discipline that has provided the country with

honours not only at the regional Games but also beyond the borders of the continent, having brought Commonwealth Games gold medals twice.

In the last 11 years, Bangladesh won shooting gold in the regional Games -- at Madras 1995, Kathmandu 1997 and Islamabad 2004.

However, youngsters Asif Hossain Khan and Sharmin Akhter, who won SA Games gold medals two years ago, would be under pressure from India to retain their Islamabad honours.

Both the 10m air rifle shooters' current scores are behind their Indian competitors and Asif, who stunned all the favourites as a 15-year-old to snatch a Commonwealth Games gold in Manchester 2002, realises the situation.

"Winning a gold looks impossible if you consider our latest form.

We are going to face stiff competition from Indian pair Gagan Narayan and Avinav Bindra whose average scores are 597 and 595 respectively," Asif told The Daily Star over phone yesterday.

"We have been training since the Commonwealth Games. We have a strong team and my partner Anjan (Kumar Singha) bhai is doing better than me. But still, my best score is 593. We have to improve much if we want to beat the Indians. That remains our target," he said.

Gagan and Avinav outgunned the Bangladesh duo earlier this year at the Melbourne C'wealth Games. Anjan settled for a silver medal in the event.

"I am confident that I can score about 595 at the Games but that might not be enough. We lack facilities. Also, it needs hard work and upgraded coaches to improve

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Star shooter Asif Hossain Khan (C) takes tips from new coach Liu Bin during a training session at the Gulshan Shooting Complex on Wednesday as part of preparations for the SA Games.

PHOTO: STAR

AGE-GROUP SWIMMING Six new nat'l records on Day 1

SPORTS REPORTER

BKSP and Bangladesh Ansar fought neck and neck on the opening day of the Keya Cosmetics 22nd National Age-group Swimming Championships at the National Swimming Complex in Mirpur yesterday.

Out of 31 events finalised on the first day of the three-day meet, BKSP bagged 12 gold medals and were closely followed by Ansars' haul of ten. Alamgir Swimming Club snatched six gold while Kushtia DSA, Meherpur Swimming Club and Nawabganj Swimming Club got one each.

Laboni Akhter Jui (women's 18-20 years group) ruled the pool, setting new national records in the 200m breaststroke and 200 butterfly. The Ansars swimmer also won gold in 100 breaststroke and a silver.

Sonia Akhter (girls' 15-17 years) of BKSP also claimed three gold, in 200m individual medley and 100 and 400m freestyle, breaking old records in the latter events.

In boys' competition, BKSP's two-gold Nazmul Haque broke the old 200m freestyle record April

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Ansars' Laboni Akhter Jui on her way to setting a new national record in the 200m breaststroke on the first day Age Group Swimming Competition on Thursday.

PHOTO: STAR