

Lanka ready for grand opening of SA Games

SPORTS REPORTER from Colombo

The Sri Lankans are planning a five-hour razzmatazz to officially kick off the tenth edition of the South Asian Games, the Games of almost one-and-a-half billion people of seven Saarc countries -- Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka -- and Afghanistan.

Over 7,000 students, who put in plenty of hard work and effort for the last thirty days, are eagerly waiting to deliver the final show after a month's rehearsal.

President Mahinda Rajapakse and Lady Rajapakse are expected to take their seats half an hour after the opening ceremony begins.

The march past, which will bring the competitors together at the Sugathadasa Stadium, will begin after the national anthem of Sri Lanka, followed by traditional Porapol contest, the Udarata Kadukara or the Tea Dance and parachute displays by the Sri Lanka Air Force and Army.

Bangladesh's SA Games swimming gold medalist Rubel Rana will carry the national flag in the march past.

Once the march past, flag raising and flame lighting formalities are over, Mahinda Rajapakse will declare the Games open.

Star athlete and Sri Lanka athletics team captain Susantika Jayasinghe will read the athletes' oath and Sunil Edirisinghe will perform the theme song before the cultural pageant begins.

All parts of Sri Lanka, the pearl of the Indian Ocean, will be represented in the long cultural programme with a lot of dances and music, display of callisthenics that will be rounded off with light fireworks because the organisers do not want to 'annoy' the city dwellers.

Sri Lanka has sought Chinese help to light the sky of the capital.



STAGE IS SET: Sri Lankan schoolgirls perform a routine during a rehearsal on Thursday at the Sugathadasa Stadium in Colombo where the 10th SA Games open today.

PHOTO: AFP

Shooting may hit target



AL MUSABBIR SADI from Colombo

The Bangladesh shooting team's hope of winning at least one gold medal at the 10th South Asian Games looks brighter as India decided not to send their leading shooters to Colombo.

Shooting has not failed to deliver a gold medal for a single time since the inception of the discipline in the biennial event at the fifth SAF Games in Colombo in 1991.

However, after Bangladesh suffered a defeat at the hands of India at their pet event, the 10m air rifle at the Melbourne Commonwealth Games earlier this year, hopes were not high in the camp.

But it was learned yesterday that Indian shooters are aiming higher

and decided not to compete in Colombo.

Avinav Bindra and Gagan Narayan, who dashed Bangladesh's hopes of retaining the Commonwealth gold medal in the event won at Manchester 2002, are concentrating on the Asian Games to be held in Doha later this year.

India won 22 out of 27 gold medals at Commonwealth and Bindra went onto win the 10m world title in Zagreb.

"They must haven't taken the Games seriously. They are now aiming to win gold in the Asiad. There are other experienced shooters who are not coming, too" informed a veteran Indian journalist yesterday.

Pistol's shooting star Jaspal Rana is also missing the trip but India will send young prospects to the Games, case in point being Navanath, who has impressed heavily in the World Shooting

Championship in Zagreb. India also have in their ranks veteran shooter Ashok Pundit, who will be the flag bearer of the country at the march past, and his son Ranak Pundit.

How Bangladesh match with the second string Indian side will depend on their mental strength and preparation.

The Bangladeshi shooters, who were restricted to shadow practice and physical training for the first three days after their arrival in the Sri Lankan capital, finally got into the action yesterday.

Coach and team manager Asbab Ali Foyaz told The Daily Star over phone from their hotel near the Waisara Navy Range, an hour's drive from the city, that the organisers have given them the chance to shoot at the range.

"It's a new venue and there was some work going on when we

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Tigers arrive home today

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh cricket team arrive in Dhaka today from a 23-day tour to Zimbabwe and Kenya.

The Tigers are due to arrive early morning at the Zia International Airport after a marathon 27-hour Qatar Airways flight. They left Dhaka on July 22.

Bangladesh had a mixed bag of a tour where they heartbreakingly lost to Zimbabwe in the one-day series 3-2.

But they had a better time of it in the Kenyan leg where they completed another clean-sweep of the East African nation, winning all three of the one-day internationals.

The team was led by wicketkeeper Khaled Mashud after regular captain Habibur Bashar sustained a hand injury in the second one-day international in Harare.

Paceman Mashrafe Bin Mortuza made a brilliant return to form by claiming all three man-of-the-match awards in the Kenya one-dayers after having conceded a staggering 18 runs in the final over in the second match against Zimbabwe which the Tigers lost.

Also during the series, ace left-arm spinner Mohammad Rafique played his 100th one-day international in the third and final one-day in Nairobi, becoming only the second Bangladeshi after Mashud to achieve this remarkable feat.

Tearaway fast bowler Shahadat Hossain Rajib became the first bowler from Bangladesh to take a hat-trick in the limited-overs version of the game during the fateful second one-day match at Harare.

Final round of NFC starts in Sylhet today

UNB, Dhaka

The final round of the Jubok Phone National Football Championship (NFC) begins today at the Sylhet Stadium with Dhaka taking on Magura at 4 pm in the day's only match.

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president SA Sultan will formally inaugurate the title-deciding final round comprising of twelve teams.

10 zonal champions -- Dhaka, Magura, Khulna, Comilla, Tangail, Joypurhat, Gaibanda, Noakhali, Dhaka University and Bangladesh Navy -- along with hosts Sylhet and defending champions Narayanganj split into four groups in this final round of matches.

No respite for booters

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh football team get back to the drawing board as they take part in a training camp beginning tomorrow at BKSP in Savar ahead of their away match of the AFC Asian Cup qualifier against Qatar in Doha on September 6.

England, at tea on the first day of the fourth Test, had slumped to 134 for six after Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq had won the toss and elected to field in overcast conditions.

Chris Read was 26 not out and Sajid Mahmood, who had been missed on nought, one not out. Asif, playing his first Test of the series after an elbow injury, struck twice in the 10th over.

He had England captain Andrew Strauss (38) edging behind where the opener was well caught by diving wicketkeeper Kamran Akmal. Bangladesh will play the remaining two home matches against Uzbekistan and Hong Kong on October 11 and November 15 respectively.



WELL DESERVED REST: Bangladesh fast bowler Mashrafe Bin Mortuza, man-of-the-series in the Bank Alfalah Cup in Kenya, takes a nap on Thursday aboard the Qatar Airways flight that took the team to Doha from Nairobi en route to Dhaka.

PHOTO: TIGERCRIKET.COM

Lankans blast SA snub

Cricket

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lankan officials and media Thursday made fun of South Africa's shell-shocked cricketers for pulling out of the tri-series, saying they would not have been able to play even if they stayed back.

Media Minister Anura Yapa said he was convinced that the South Africans were pulling out not because of fears of bomb blasts as they have officially claimed but because of bad weather.

"Even if they are here, they can't play cricket. The weather is bad," Yapa told reporters. "They may have got some information from the met department."

The South Africans had told local police that they received an e-mail from a previously unknown group claiming that there will be more bombings in Colombo following a deadly attack aimed at a Pakistan diplomat on Monday.

The Proteas abandoned the tri-series on Wednesday, saying "the current risk to the team is at an unacceptable level" following the

blast near their hotel on Monday which killed seven people and injured eight.

But Cricket South Africa's assertion that an independent security assessment by a Dubai-based firm agreed with the team's own fears was ridiculed by Sri Lanka Cricket (SLC) chief executive Duleep Mendis.

"I am amazed at their decision to return home," Mendis, a former Sri Lankan Test captain, told AFP. "The government put in place presidential-level security for the team, yet they were not convinced."

"They took advice from a Dubai firm which is even more surprising. I did not see anyone from this firm in Colombo, yet they prepared a security report within 24 hours sitting in Dubai."

The state-run Daily News, under the headline "South African cricketers chicken out", said: "They are used to playing in threatening conditions. In South Africa, one has to be careful when even taking a stroll on the streets."

India, not surprisingly, was praised for staying in Colombo to play three one-day internationals against the hosts on Friday, Sunday and Tuesday in lieu of the tri-series.

"India understood the situation better than the South Africans and accepted our assurances on security," said SLC media manager Samantha Algama.

The three matches will be played as day games at the Sinhalese sports club with a reserve day being kept aside for each match in case of bad weather.

The tri-series did not see a ball being bowled in the first two matches due to heavy rain which lashed the Sri Lankan capital over the last week. The forecast is for clear weather over the weekend.

Indian captain Rahul Dravid said his team was more concerned about the weather than the security arrangements.

"No one came to me and said he wanted to go home," Dravid told reporters. "Everyone is keen to play. We are probably worried more about the weather than the security."

Dravid denied there was any contradiction between South Africa flying home and the Indians opting to stay on in Colombo.

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Asif brings Pak luck back

Cricket

AFP, London

Fast bowler Mohammad Asif marked his return to Test cricket with three wickets for four runs in 11 balls as Pakistan took charge of their series climax with England at The Oval here Thursday.

England, at tea on the first day of the fourth Test, had slumped to 134 for six after Pakistan captain Inzamamul Haq had won the toss and elected to field in overcast conditions.

Chris Read was 26 not out and Sajid Mahmood, who had been missed on nought, one not out. Asif, playing his first Test of the series after an elbow injury, struck twice in the 10th over.

He had England captain Andrew Strauss (38) edging behind where the opener was well caught by diving wicketkeeper Kamran Akmal. Bangladesh will play the remaining two home matches against Uzbekistan and Hong Kong on October 11 and November 15 respectively.

And Cook, having top-scored with 40 was lbw to a full-length yorker from medium-pace Shahid Nazir having faced 69 balls with six fours.

England were lucky that 112 for six did not become 118 for seven when Mahmood went down the pitch to Kaneria only for Akmal to miss the stumping.

They'd resumed on 27 without

loss after rain meant only eight overs were possible in the morning session.

Opener Marcus Trescothick, the only member of England's top six yet to score a century this series.

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WHOOSH: England opener Marcus Trescothick sways away from a bouncer off Pakistan pacer Umar Gul on the opening day of the fourth and final Test at The Oval on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP



Did U Know?

The world's first roller-coaster opened in 1884 at Coney Island, New York. It was designed by Lemercus Thompson, a former Sunday school teacher.



ESPN

England v Pakistan

Fourth Test, Day 2

Live at 4:00 pm

TEN Sports

Sri Lanka v India

First ODI

Live at 10:30 am



John Buchanan

(Australia cricket coach)

"Those pictures and memories are indelibly etched into history, as well as into the feelings of all the Australian team that gathered solemnly to congratulate the opposition. Since that moment, I think all of us, in our own ways, began preparing for the next Ashes series clash."

While saying he still smarted at memories of England's wild celebrations after winning the Ashes series for the first time in 18 years in 2005.

1st Indo-Lankan ODI today

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

An hour after the Indians came back from a practice session at the Premadasa Stadium -- the Sri Lankans had commandeered the SSC -- the rain started again, jeopardising chances of play in the first one-day international scheduled for Friday.

With the skies having stayed clear Thursday morning, both teams enjoyed lengthy practice sessions, even as South Africa's players waited for the flights that would take them home.

After all the uncertainty of the past two days, and the confusion of Wednesday evening when a whistle-stop three-match series was arranged, it was back to the mundane business of preparing for matches. After days spent in a security cocoon, the players seemed to relish the chance to do what they do best -- bat, bowl and field, while having a laugh or two.

The switching of the matches to the SSC will encourage the Indians, whose batsmen rarely do justice to their reputations on surfaces as sluggish as that at the Premadasa. Their record there -- eight wins against just four losses in 15 games -- is also drastically different from the indifferent one at the Premadasa. Even against Sri Lanka, they have been dominant, with four wins and two reverses in seven matches.

One of the batsmen will have

particularly fond memories of the ground. Virender Sehwag had just one 50 from his first 14 one-day matches, and the decision to promote him to open in the Coca Cola Cup of 2001 appeared not to be paying dividends. Replacing the irreplaceable Sachin Tendulkar, Sehwag had managed scores of 33, 27 and 0 before India came up against New Zealand in a must-win

encounter.

Set a stiff target of 265, Sehwag came out and played one of the defining innings of his career, an astonishing assault that culminated in a 69-ball century. After that, there was no looking back. The chances are though that he will bat in the middle order tomorrow, with Rahul Dravid and Tendulkar

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Cricket Paribar, an organisation of former players and organisers, formed a human-chain in front of the National Sports Council yesterday demanding holding of the 2011 Cricket World Cup's opening game at the Bangabandhu National Stadium. They also protested the laying of athletics track at the famed cricket venue.

PHOTO: COURTESY