



Dr Ali Emran (C), an associate professor of BSMMU, leads Bangladesh national football team manager Satyajit Das (L) and a batch of footballers to the testing facilities where the players and officials got tested for Covid-19 yesterday before travelling to an isolated resort in Gazipur for a residential camp. PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Four test positive, but booters raring to train

SPORTS REPORTER



Moving past the fear of coronavirus infection, national footballers were looking forward to starting afresh as the first batch yesterday joined the training camp for the Joint Qualifiers for World Cup and Asian Cup at Sarah Resorts in Gazipur after four and a half months of inaction.

Team manager Satyajit Das Rupu informed defender Bishwanath Ghosh, who was part of the first batch of 12 players, will not join the camp as he tested positive for Covid-19 on August 3 as part of the Bangladesh Football Federation's (BFF's) prerequisites to join the camp. The BFF organised a second round of tests for the footballers and seven officials yesterday at the BSMMU before leaving for Gazipur yesterday evening.

Three more footballers - Suman

Reza, MS Bablu and Nazmul Islam -- were found positive in yesterday's tests as those three, along with Bishwanath -- were eventually left behind in Dhaka.

The players are supposed to start low-intensity training this afternoon while the second batch of 12 footballers are scheduled to join the camp today after going through the Covid-19 tests. On Friday, seven other footballers will follow the same process, while captain Jamal Bhuiyan's and defender Tariq Raihan Kazi's presence will be subject to the availability of return flights to Bangladesh.

Head coach Jamie Day and assistant coach Stuart Watkiss are scheduled to arrive in Dhaka on August 16.

"My family did not want me to come to Dhaka during the coronavirus pandemic but I convinced them a month ago and continued training at my club ground," said midfielder Mohammad Abdullah, who was

recalled to the preliminary squad after two years following an injury sustained in 2018.

"Everyone is scared of coronavirus but I am not worried because we have to overcome the barriers and if we can train while maintaining social distance, there is nothing to worry about," said the Sheikh Russel KC midfielder.

"I know it is now more challenging to secure a place in the final squad but I like the challenge because I know the pain of staying away from the national team," said Abdullah.

"Coronavirus is of course to be feared because we travelled from different districts to come to Dhaka and don't know each other's health conditions," said striker Suman Reza, who was later found to be Covid-positive.

Bangladesh will host Afghanistan in Sylhet on October 8 before travelling to Qatar to play their away match against the Asian Champions on October 13.

Azhar's duck in Pak's shaky start

AFP, MANCHESTER

Pakistan captain Azhar Ali was out for a duck as the first Test against England got under way at Old Trafford on Wednesday.

At lunch, the tourists were 53-2, with opener Shan Masood having batted through a tough session to be 27 not out and Babar Azam unbeaten on four.

With two leg-spinners in Yasir Shah and Shadab Khan in Pakistan's side, there was a logic in Azhar's decision to bat first after he won the toss, with his slow bowlers likely to be more effective on a wearing pitch.

Nevertheless, the overcast skies and piercing floodlights made life tough for opening batsmen with conditions favouring England's four-man pace attack, who had been involved in a recent 2-1 series win over the West Indies. In contrast, Pakistan's preparation for this three-match series amounted to just two intra-squad warm-up games.

Shan Masood and fellow opener Abid Ali did well to survive the first hour against an unchanged England.

James Anderson, closing in on his 600th Test wicket, took the new ball on his Lancashire home ground in the company of longstanding team-mate Stuart Broad, fresh from becoming just the seventh bowler to take 500 Test wickets.

But it was Jofra Archer who made the breakthrough as he cleverly bowled Abid Ali with a full-length delivery for 16.

Kirsten 'meets' TIGERS

SPORTS REPORTER



Former India head coach Gary Kirsten, who was appointed by the Bangladesh Cricket Board as a consultant in the past and oversaw the selection of Steve Rhodes as head coach in 2018, took part in a virtual meeting of the Bangladesh national cricket team yesterday.

Members of the national squad had a few virtual meetings since the Covid-19 outbreak, with head coach Russell Domingo and his staff conducting the meetings. It was Kirsten who shared his experience with the 'Tigers' and the coaching staff yesterday.

The meeting lasted more than an hour where the former South African opening batsman shared his experience both as a player and also as a coach. Few of the cricketers relayed their queries to Kirsten as the players are gearing to get back to the field following a long break from cricket since mid-March.

"Mainly he (Kirsten) discussed on how we could return to cricket and the areas that we need to focus on and things like that. It was a pretty general meeting where we all took part in the discussion," one of the members of the national squad, requesting anonymity, told The Daily Star.

Following the long break, a number of national team members have already begun individual practice at BCB's facilities across the country, with more players showing interest to start training from August 8.

"This is a decision I never wanted to take but I have decided to follow my heart this time and for the time being I rather not travel."

The 34-year-old Spanish star also took aim at the international tennis schedule, which has been revised following disruptions sparked by COVID-19 shutdowns.

The US Open in New York, scheduled for August 31 through September 13, will be followed a fortnight later by the French Open at Roland Garros.

"We know that the reduced tennis calendar is barbaric this year after 4 months stopped with no play..." Nadal said.

With Nadal's long-time rival Roger Federer already ruled out of the tournament as he recovers from knee surgery, the US Open will mark the first time since 1999 that neither player has featured in the main draw of a Grand Slam event.

Nadal, who has 19 Grand Slam victories, could have equalled Federer's tally of 20 Slam wins in New York.



Bangladesh batsman Mahmudullah Riyad was seen practising at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. PHOTO: BCB

Nadal skips US Open

AFP, New York

Defending champion Rafael Nadal said Tuesday he will not play the US Open, citing concerns over the coronavirus and slamming tennis's "barbaric" revised calendar.

"After many thoughts I have decided not to play this year's US Open," Nadal said on Twitter.

"The situation is very complicated worldwide, the Covid-19 cases are increasing, it looks like we still don't have control of it."

"This is a decision I never wanted to take but I have decided to follow my heart this time and for the time being I rather not travel."

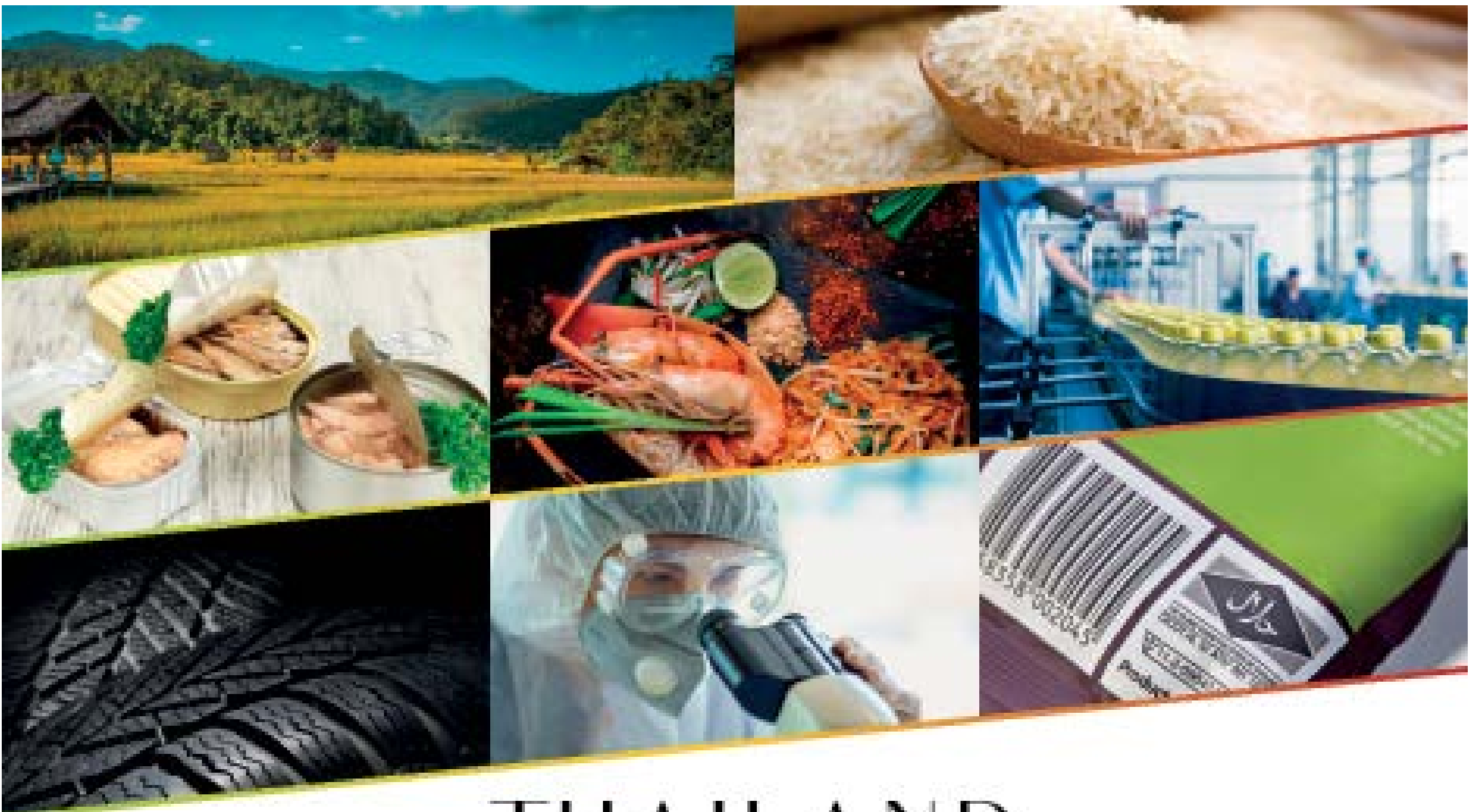
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