



The Tigers finally reunited as bio-security measures coupled with players testing negative for coronavirus allowed them to resume group training. The Bangladesh Cricket Board arranged the skills camp as players aim to collectively work off the rust with a return to cricket on the cards.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Tigers back training together

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh national team trained as a group at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday after 198 days as members of the preliminary squad for the tour of Sri Lanka converged upon the home of cricket.

Following the group training, the cricketers checked in to a city hotel and will remain in a bio-secure bubble and undergo group training till September 26.

Meanwhile, according to a BCB press release, two cricketers among the 27-member squad who were tested on September 18 and 19 have been identified as "borderline negative" with one of them showing classical Covid-19-like symptoms.

According to the Covid-19 management guidelines and to maintain the bio-secure environment standards, these cricketers along with all the players who have been in close contact with the symptomatic cricketer recently, have been isolated until the next test on September 22.

Earlier, BCB's chief physician Dr Debashish Chowdhury explained the bio-secure plan which is along the lines of the England and Wales Cricket Board and the ICC health guidelines, with frequent testing being a feature.

He also added that hotel, transportation, restaurant, training facilities and medical facilities of the players and staff will all be kept inside a bubble for the week-long residential camp.

The cricketers had been training individually since August, and started their skills training as a

group yesterday under head coach Russell Domingo.

The experienced Mahmudullah Riyad -- who will be looking to make a comeback in the Test side -- was excited to be back to the field as a unit yesterday.

"We started individual sessions around four or five weeks ago, so got a lot of time to work on personal things. I spoke to the batting coach [back then] and worked as per his guidelines. Now we are working as a team. The team is excited to be back; as at the end of the day it is a team game and it is useful when you got to enjoy the work with the colleagues," Mahmudullah told the media following practice.

"The time during lockdown was tough because we were away from the team and the field. We had to stay busy with running and gym but not skills practice. We had individual sessions for a few weeks

and are now training as a team."

Meanwhile, BCB CEO Nizamuddin Chowdhury on Saturday said they are expecting to hear from SLC in the next couple of days about the fate of the three-match Test series, which is part of the ICC Test Championship.

Although SLC is yet to provide the revised health protocols, according to BCB officials their Sri Lankan counterparts are on track and are hopeful of getting the green signal and continuing preparations for the tour.

If the tour finally gets the green light, Bangladesh are expected to travel to Colombo on September 27, one month before the series begins with the first Test on October 24.

The first two Tests are likely to be played in Kandy while the third and the final Test of the series is expected to held in Colombo.

Salahuddin's panel reveal lofty manifesto

SPORTS REPORTER

Kazi Salahuddin-led Combined Panel set a lofty target to bring Bangladesh national team around the mark of 150 FIFA ranking in next four years as it announced a 36-point manifesto over five segments during introduction of panel candidates for Bangladesh Football Federation's (BFF) October 3 polls at a hotel in the capital yesterday.

The five segments include the national team, domestic football, women's football, development projects and technical areas. The manifesto includes some of the routine works such as holding leagues and tournaments at all levels, hunting talent and coaches' courses. However, it unfortunately does not make any promise to bring professionalism into clubs -- a key component of football development.

The declaration of manifesto highlighted Salahuddin's past 12 years instead of focusing on the successes and failures of the last four years. The last four years saw Bangladesh hit the lowest FIFA ranking in its history and the national football team was eliminated from the group stages of SAFF Championship for the fourth consecutive time and failed to reach the final of Bangabandhu Gold Cup twice.

"When I came to the BFF in 2008, Bangladesh was at 180 FIFA Ranking and now it's 187. FIFA ranking depends on a lot of things and playing friendly matches is important. We could not play friendly matches for three years due to the financial structure but we are now playing friendlies and we are at 187," Salahuddin said. "I don't agree that we could not produce good players. The players don't get media exposure; media instead talks to former players who retired from football some 20 to 25 years ago."

In 2008, Bangladesh were at 174 FIFA ranking and next year it moved up to 149 following some good results at international level, but since then it has been a downward spiral, hitting 197th in

2017 following a disastrous World Cup qualifying campaign, where they were eliminated after defeat against Bhutan.

Denying the 2016 election manifesto as his own, Salahuddin said, "We have covered 70 to 75 percent of 2016 manifesto which was, however, not my manifesto as many things that I recommended were not included. That manifesto was basically Tarafder Ruhul Amin's. But this time the manifesto has been prepared for three months and it includes two new tournaments, namely Sheikh Kamal U-18/19 and Sheikh Russel U-10 national tournaments."

More than half the agenda of the 2016 election manifesto included strengthening clubs' age-group teams, development youth football under BFF supervision, resuming Sylhet Football Academy, hunting talents across the country and nursing them at home before sending selected ones aboard for a strong pipeline for the national team. Unfortunately, the Salahuddin-led committee failed to achieve any of those in the last term.

This time, the manifesto only mentions of continuing the Fortis-BFF Academy, which is now non-functional. The manifesto also promises setting up technical centres in Dhaka and beyond and establishing football centres across the country for non-residential training of budding footballers.

Asked about the allegation of harassment of president candidate Badal Roy, Salahuddin said, "I have not talked to the election commission regarding anything yet. There is no question of influencing the election commission. I know the election commission and Badal Roy would come in my favour if I put pressure, but I won't misuse my power. I am powerful but I don't misuse power. Now election commission will decide."

Chief coordinator of the panel, Chattogram Abahani secretary general Alhaz Shamsul Hoque Chowdhury, praised Salahuddin highly but criticised two other president candidates -- Badal Roy and Shafiqul Islam Manik -- heavily.



'It's all love now'

REUTERS, London

Arsenal match-winner Eddie Nketiah has mended fences with team mate Dani Ceballos after a standoff between the pair a week ago was forgotten as they linked up to secure a 2-1 victory over West Ham United in the Premier League on Saturday.

During the warm-up before Arsenal's match at newly-promoted Fulham last week, Nketiah, 21, and Ceballos, 24, were seen to clash briefly, in a clip widely shared on social media. But they seem to have set their differences aside since then and on Saturday at The Emirates the Spaniard laid off the ball for England Under-21 captain Nketiah to score.

Speaking about the clash with Ceballos and the goal, Nketiah told Sky Sports: "We had a bit of a coming together. The reaction was there. We made up and got on



with it. It was a great pass across, good vision. I tried to stay inside. It was an easy finish from there. It was nice for him to make the assist - it's all love now," he added.

Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta praised Nketiah's contribution as a substitute and suggested it was an example other players who want time on the pitch should follow. "It's so important for him and the team as well. It's a message to everyone on the bench that they have a mission when they come on," he told reporters.

Asked about the Nketiah-Ceballos incident last week, Arteta gave a light-hearted response. "That's the beauty of this sport. Today they found a way to understand each other," he said.

The Hammers were denied a penalty for handball inside the box, almost a carbon copy of what had cost Victor Lindelof and Manchester United a penalty earlier in the day. "I definitely think we should have had a penalty," West Ham manager Moyes said about a handball. "But we don't know the rules, really, do we?" "Not to be rewarded with some points tonight is really hard on us," added Moyes. "For us just to turn off in the last five minutes, it's criminal."



FACE SAYS IT ALL: Erling Haaland scored twice and teenager Giovanni Reyna added another as Borussia Dortmund made a perfect start with a 3-0 win over Borussia Moenchengladbach in their Bundesliga opener on Saturday. Some 9,300 fans were allowed into the Signal Iduna Park, making it the best-attended game in Germany since coronavirus restrictions took hold in March.

PHOTO: TWITTER

Barto not seeking 'conflict'

AGENCIES

An early strike from Antoine Griezmann gave Barcelona a 1-0 win at home to Elche their final pre-season friendly on Saturday, with club president Josep Maria Bartomeu saying afterwards that he did not want 'any conflict' with Lionel Messi.

The Argentine played a defence-splitting ball to Jordi Alba in the second minute, whose cut-back found an unmarked Griezmann.

"I won't get into any conflict with him [Messi]. He's our captain and leader," Bartomeu said. "I couldn't let him leave the club, he is the best player of all time and the team needs him. Having Messi is a guarantee of success."

"We have seen him do his talking on the pitch and we have moved on from the saga," Bartomeu added. "We should



congratulate ourselves for getting Messi to stay with us and for how he has behaved in the last few days. The best player in the world should stay at our home."

Koeman surprisingly left home-grown midfielder Riqui Puig out of the squad, saying after the game that he would prefer the player to go

out on loan as he would not get many chances this season.

Bartomeu also ruled out resigning, despite a vote of no-confidence against him looming.

"The board and I will keep working to ensure we have the most competitive team possible," he said. "We will speak again after validating the votes but right now no-one wants to quit. The club won't stop and we will keep working, we have lots of issues to sort out."

Dhoni a 'genius'

REUTERS

England all-rounder Sam Curran termed Chennai Super Kings captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni a "genius" after justifying his surprise promotion in the batting order in their IPL opener against Mumbai Indians on Saturday.

After Ravindra Jadeja fell in the 19th over, leaving Chennai needing 29 off 17 deliveries, former India captain Dhoni or fellow right-hander Kedar Jadhav was expected to join Faf du Plessis in the middle.

Dhoni sent Curran instead and the 22-year-old clobbered two sixes and a four in his six-ball cameo before Chennai triumphed by five wickets with four balls to spare.

"To be honest, very surprised I went in but he's a genius, he obviously thought something," Curran said at Abu Dhabi's Sheikh Zayed Stadium. "A great win in the end."

The left-handed batsman reckoned his promotion was partly because Dhoni wanted a left-right combination and said his aggression against left-arm spinner Krunal Pandya was premeditated.

"That was the over we wanted to target - a six or out approach mentality. Take the risk, and if it comes off it comes off, if it doesn't, it doesn't."

No excuses, says Nadal

AGENCIES

Clay court king Rafael Nadal crashed out of the Italian Open on Saturday, falling to a straight sets defeat to Argentine Diego Schwartzman in a tournament the Spaniard had won nine times.

Eight-seeded Schwartzman meted out a punishing 6-2, 7-5 loss in Nadal's final warm-up before his bid for a 13th



French Open, and record-equalling 20th Grand Slam in just over a week.

Men's top seed Novak Djokovic also stumbled on the Roman clay but recovered to win 6-3, 4-6, 6-3 against German qualifier Dominik Koepfer.

"We can find excuses, but I didn't play well enough. Then we have to think internally, 'Why? How I can fix it?'" the 34-year-old told reporters. "Now is not the moment to find excuses. It's just to accept that I didn't play well enough."

"It was not my night. He played a great match, I think, and I didn't. These things can happen. After such a long time without competing, I played two good matches, and now I played a bad one against a good opponent."

"That's how it is. I just want to congratulate Diego and I'm going to keep working."



Tottenham Hotspur's Korean forward Son Heung-min celebrates one of his four goals with Harry Kane during a 5-2 rout of Southampton at the St Mary's Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS