



Nepal national football team arrive at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport yesterday to play two international friendlies against Bangladesh on November 13 and 17 at the Bangabandhu National Stadium. This is the first time that a foreign team have come to the country since TC Sports Club of Maldives visited in March this year for their AFC Cup fixture against Bashundhara Kings before the outbreak of Covid-19. PHOTO: BFF

## Nepal arrive to end football's long hiatus

SPORTS REPORTER



Putting behind the anxiety when some of their players tested positive for Covid-19, the Nepal national football team yesterday landed in Dhaka to play two FIFA international friendlies against hosts Bangladesh.

Nepal had to leave behind seven footballers – five of whom tested positive during training in Nepal and two who tested positive shortly before the team flew out. Nepal however did not face much problems creating the 25-member squad, even though it is also missing seven members of the squad for the World Cup

Qualifiers tie against Kuwait in Kathmandu in September 2019.

Notable among those missing are overseas leagues players – goalkeeper Kiran Chemjong, midfielder Rohit Chand and Abhishek Rijal. Bangladesh have not yet announced their final squad, but midfielder Mamumul Islam was ruled out of the two friendlies due to a fracture on his left hand.

Both Bangladesh and Nepal have been out of action since the coronavirus outbreak in the subcontinent in March. Both are however all set to return to competitive football through two matches on Nov 13 and 17.

They will also renew their rivalry for the first time in more than two years,

having last played an international when hosts Bangladesh lost 0-2 to Nepal in the SAFF Championship in September, 2018. However, the countries' Olympic teams faced off against each other last December during the South Asian Games.

After arriving here, Nepal coach Bal Gopal Maharjan said the two friendlies would help both sides and they are looking forward to performing well, instead of thinking much about the outcomes.

"Nepal government gave us the authority to play two FIFA friendlies, which will be good for the development of Nepal football. It is also good for Nepal for the upcoming World Cup qualifiers at home. I think this match will benefit both Bangladesh and Nepal and that's why we

have come here," said Maharjan, who was once a familiar face in Bangladesh's domestic league.

Maharjan, who guided Nepal U-23 team to the Bangabandhu Gold Cup title in 2016, said he is focusing on both performance and results.

"Focus will be on good performance and good results but I am not talking about wins or losses... we are going to give our best because we have come here for friendlies, and it is also a matter of the FIFA ranking," said Maharjan, who played for Brothers Union from 1991 to 1993 and coached the same team in 2016-17.

The Nepal football team are supposed to start training from Saturday, having undergone Covid-19 tests yesterday.

## SHAKIB SPEAKS

While responding to questions from fans and journalists around the globe on his YouTube channel on Wednesday, Bangladesh all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan talked about his ICC ban for failing to report corrupt approaches from a bookie, the coronavirus pandemic and the lessons he learnt during this long break. Below are some of the highlights from his answers:

- The pandemic and the ICC ban helped him to think about life differently...taught him to generate more ideas.
- He was happy as he didn't miss too many matches during ban.
- The silver lining of his enforced absence was that he could spend a lot of time with family during the birth of his second daughter.
- While he said the question of whether he would regain the trust and confidence of his teammates was a bit difficult to answer, the all-rounder thought it would not be surprising to see his teammates not trusting him completely.



- He could have been banned before the World Cup but it never crossed his mind that he would have to do well just because he was being investigated.
- He had to play well in the World Cup as he could not do much in the previous editions and he had to do justice to the reputation that he had and age was on his side as he was in a phase of life where athletes usually enjoy their best form.
- Responding to a question, he also said he wanted his favourite footballer Lionel Messi to leave Barcelona in order to join Manchester City or PSG because he believes Messi would be able to play with freedom at those clubs.



## 'IT'S A VERY SPECIAL NUMBER'

Rafael Nadal became the fourth man to win 1,000 Tour-level matches on Wednesday by beating Feliciano Lopez at the Paris Masters. The 34-year-old, who won a record-extending 13th French Open title across Paris at Roland Garros last month, followed Jimmy Connors, Roger Federer and Ivan Lendl in reaching the 1,000 mark. Nadal was given a special presentation to celebrate his achievement after the match in a near-empty Bercy Arena, with the event being played behind closed doors after France entered its second coronavirus lockdown last week. "It has been a special moment. I know it's a very special number, 1000," said the 20-time Grand Slam champion. "Even if it's not the same to celebrate something like this without a crowd, I enjoyed it with ATP, with the president of the French Federation, Guy Forget, supervisor and the ball boys. "I enjoyed it and just can say thanks to all of them to make this moment a little bit more special."

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Australia confirms cross-country BBL

REUTERS, MELBOURNE



Australia's upcoming Big Bash League (BBL) will be a moving feast, with the domestic Twenty20 competition travelling across the country in a touring model as Covid-19 curbs ease.

Cricket Australia (CA) on Thursday locked in the schedule for the opening 21 matches, with the first bracket from Dec. 10 starting in Tasmania state and Canberra before moving to Queensland and South Australia later in the month.

Cricket Australia said it would confirm the schedule for the remaining 35 regular season matches and the finals series later.

"This is without doubt the most complex fixturing task ever undertaken by the League and we are excited with where it has landed," CA's BBL chief Alistair Dobson said in a statement.

## A historic night for Basaksehir

AGENCIES



Manchester United suffered a shock 2-1 defeat at Istanbul Basaksehir on Wednesday, the English side's first loss in three Champions League group matches and the Turkish champions' first victory in Europe's premier club competition.

"We played well in the first two games too, but finally we secured a win. This is a big result for us, we are really proud," said Edin Visca.

United went behind after 12 minutes in Turkey when Visca's pass found Demba Ba in space at the halfway line and the striker ran forward before finishing past Dean Henderson and Basaksehir doubled their lead before the break when Juan Mata lost possession and Ba turned provider for Visca to score.

"Demba Ba, Martin, and Rafael are players with English backgrounds, and therefore it is very important to show themselves again, but they always try to show it in every performance," said Istanbul Basaksehir coach Okan Buruk.

United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer said his team's defending in the first half of Wednesday's 2-1 defeat was "unforgivable" and admitted "it's not easy to be positive" after an 'unforgivable' performance.

Former United midfielder Paul Scholes said their defending was "embarrassing".

"It's completely down to organisation. It's like under-10s football. What the defence were doing I have no idea. The goal is



Istanbul Basaksehir's Edin Visca celebrates his goal while (below) Manchester United manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer looks dejected after the defeat.

PHOTO: TWITTER/REUTERS

comical, laughable," Scholes told BT Sport.

Wednesday's result ended Manchester United's longest away winning run in all competitions in their history (10 straight wins) and was their first away defeat in 19 matches since losing in January at Liverpool in the Premier League.

Marcus Rashford is "heartbroken" by Manchester United's recent struggles but remains confident his side can bounce back by returning to the basics.

LAMPARD PLEASED WITH CHELSEA

Chelsea manager Frank Lampard said his side's 3-0 Champions League victory over 10-man Stade Rennais on Wednesday showed the progress they were making.

Chelsea extended their unbeaten run in all competitions to seven games and it was Chelsea's fifth straight clean sheet, the first time they have managed the feat since 2010, according to

Opta statistics.

"I'm pleased," Lampard said.

STEGEN, BARCA'S REAL HERO  
Barcelona earned a far from convincing 2-1 win at home to a depleted Dynamo Kyiv on Wednesday. The victory however put Barca on the verge of a place in the knockout stages. Marc ter Stegen returned to the competition in spectacular form as the German was decisive with five high-level interventions against Kiev.

Barca coach Ronald Koeman was visibly anxious on the sidelines and did not attempt to gloss over the sloppy performance.

"We suffered more today than in any other game so far, we need to improve a lot when we don't have the ball. I'm happy with the result but not with certain aspects of our game and luckily we had Ter Stegen around. I think we started well and got the goal early and had some clear chances but after that we lost control and they created a lot of danger. Thanks to

Marc, who was phenomenal, he held on," said the Dutchman.

LEIPZIG BATTLE BACK TO WIN 2-1 OVER PSG

RB Leipzig fought back to beat Paris St Germain 2-1 at home in a pulsating Group H clash that kept them on course for a last-16 spot while putting the French side, who finished the game with nine men, in a precarious position.

MORATA BRACE HELPS JUVE

Alvaro Morata scored twice before two defensive mistakes helped Juventus to a 4-1 Champions League win at Ferencvaros as they bounced back from last week's defeat by Barcelona.

"Games can become easy only



if you play well," said Juventus captain Giorgio Chiellini.

HAALAND TOO HOT FOR BRUGGE

In-form Erling Haaland scored twice as Borussia Dortmund surged to the top of Group F with a comfortable 3-0 victory over hosts Club Brugge.

Dortmund scored all of their goals inside the first 32 minutes as they overwhelmed their hosts with some incisive attacking play. Belgian international Thorgan Hazard gave Dortmund the lead in the 14th minute before Haaland scored twice.



[L-R] Borussia Dortmund's Erling Haaland celebrates his first goal against Club Brugge while Alvaro Morata is ecstatic after scoring twice during Juventus's 4-1 win over Ferencvaros. Meanwhile, Antoine Griezmann congratulates Lionel Messi after the Barcelona superstar successfully converted a penalty against Dynamo Kyiv.

PHOTO: TWITTER/REUTERS

## Gayle's heart-warming message for Kohli

AGENCIES

Wishes have been pouring in for India captain Virat Kohli who turned 32 on Thursday. From fans to fellow cricketers, quite a few have taken to social media to wish the modern-day legend. One common narrative in all those special messages has been 'good luck' messages for the IPL 2020 campaign.

Royal Challengers Bangalore captain Kohli on Thursday celebrated his 32nd birthday with his teammates and wife Anushka Sharma on a private yacht in Abu Dhabi.

A day after his birthday, Kohli will lead Bangalore in the eliminator of IPL 2020 against Sunrisers Hyderabad in Abu Dhabi. It's an all-important match for Kohli and RCB as they are bidding to end 12-year-long title drought.

RCB supporters will be hoping that the birthday brings luck to Virat Kohli and his men when they face a must-win situation on Friday.

Virat Kohli's former RCB teammate and Kings XI Punjab star Chris Gayle took to social media to wish the 'legend' and send him some luck for the play-offs.

"Happy birthday legend, @imVkohli ...wish you many more KaKa! Bring it home for RCB," Gayle said while posting a throwback photo from their RCB days.

RCB shared a video of Kohli's birthday celebrations on their official Youtube channel. In the video, DeVilliers was heard saying that giving him the IPL trophy this year would be the cherry on the cake for RCB players.

"You are a fantastic person and I just wish you have a wonderful day with us here at the IPL, cherry on the cake obviously for us would be to give you that IPL trophy this year," the former South Africa captain said.