

Nat'l camp begins at BKSP

SPORTS REPORTER

Shafiqul Islam Manik began his preparation for the Merdeka Cup yesterday with 26 footballers at BKSP.

The new national football coach, who had called 30 players in his preliminary squad for the October 15-25 international tournament in Malaysia, had to start without Muktijodha fullback Feroz Mahmud Titu and Sheikh Russel striker Alfaz Ahmed who stayed back in Dhaka for their third round matches of the B. League and Abahani midfielders Mehdi Hassan Ujjal and Arif Khan Joy, both opting out due to personal reasons and injury respectively.

"I relieved the Brothers Union players after light warm-up as they played a match yesterday. Then I went for a match with the rest for about 45 minutes in the afternoon," Manik told The Daily Star over phone from the Savar sports institute.

"I'll stress on playing match here, provided the ground is okay but those who looked a bit unfit, will have to go through special sessions. We are planning a few day's hard training but I don't want to wear out the footballers," he added.

Manik has former national goalkeeper Atiq as the goalkeeping coach in the camp, which will run till October 4.

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Did U Know?

Former Blackburn Rovers and Newcastle United striker Alan Shearer holds the record for most English Premier League goals with 260.



Salomon Kalou

(Chelsea striker)
"It is a good feeling to come off the bench and score because it was a very important goal. Hopefully, I can get another one at Portsmouth. It will give us confidence being in front of Manchester because they won the league by two points last season."

After scoring the equaliser against Manchester United on Wednesday.



ESPN

English Premier League
Everton v Liverpool
Live from 5:40pm
Man United v Bolton
Live from 7:55pm
Arsenal v Hull City
Live from 10:25pm
Primera Liga
Espanyol v Barcelona
Live from 2:00am (Sunday)

STAR Sports

English Premier League
Stoke City v Chelsea
Live from 7:55pm



Citycell B. League
Sheikh Russel v Khulna Abahani (3:30pm)
Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium



Recalled batsman Nafees Iqbal drives the ball towards long-off as wicketkeeper Mushfiqur Rahim looks on during a practice match at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

'No pressure on seniors'

Cricket

INTERNET, undated

Captain Anil Kumble insists India's ageing middle-order are under no additional pressure ahead of the Border-Gavaskar series with Australia.

Sourav Ganguly, Rahul Dravid, Sachin Tendulkar and VVS Laxman each performed poorly by their lofty standards as India lost the Test series to Sri Lanka 2-1 last month.

Ganguly was subsequently dropped from the Rest of India side for the Irani Trophy, the traditional season opener against the Ranji Trophy champions, leaving him with a very slender chance of making the Test team.

There have been calls for Dravid, Laxman and Kumble himself to be

axed, but the captain said his players were used to the pressure.

"When we look around in the dressing room, there is no pressure on any individual," Kumble told the Mumbai Mirror.

"These are experienced players we are talking about and they have had pressure to perform throughout their career and they have handled it wonderfully well."

Kumble backed his teammates to put the loss in Sri Lanka behind them and believes the famed middle-order quartet will bounce back against Australia.

"The Sri Lanka series is over and these guys are now looking forward to settling scores with Australia," he added.

"Whenever we've won at home it's the batsmen who have scored the runs and that's the key." The leg-spinner asserted that

spin would also play a vital role.

"As usual, the spinners will play an important role as we are playing in India," he said.

"Spin is our strength and no matter what the surface, our spinners have certainly performed and we expect the same."

"We are concentrating on our strengths and we would play to our strength."

Kumble hopes victory in the first Test, which begins on October 9, can provide momentum for the remainder of the series.

"Any home side is expected to win, no matter what the opposition and we would like to take that as a confidence booster," said Kumble.

"In any series the first match is very important to get the momentum and the upper hand, and we are hoping to grab that in this series."

Sachin fit for series

CRICINFO, undated

Sachin Tendulkar has been declared fit for the Test series against Australia next month. He will be part of the preparatory camp at the National Cricket Academy (NCA) starting on September 30.

BCCI secretary Niranjan Shah, said Paul Close, India's physio, submitted a report to the board stating Tendulkar had fully recovered from the elbow injury he sustained in Sri Lanka last month.

Tendulkar had twisted his elbow while fielding during the third Test in Sri Lanka and was forced out of the one-dayers that followed. He was named in the Rest of India squad for the Irani Cup but pulled out at the last minute because of a stiff elbow.

Players picked for the four-Test series against Australia will report to the NCA in Bangalore on Monday for the camp that goes on till October 7, two days before the start of the first Test in Bangalore.

Tamim, Shakib, Salma awarded

SPORTS REPORTER

Sensational left-hander Tamim Iqbal was named Aramex Bengal Tigers cricketer of the year for season 2007-08.

Shakib Al Hasan, the all-rounder, got the award for 2006-07 at a function in a local hotel yesterday, arranged by Bangladesh cricket team's fan club 'Bengal Tigers' while Salma Khatun was named the female cricketer of the year 2007-08.

Shakib and Tamim received Tk 20,000 and a crest while Salma received Tk 10,000 and a crest.

The fan club selected the best cricketers for the last two years by direct voting of its members and some cricket personalities from a shortlist considering the performance of the nominees in international cricket.

Aramex International managing director and former BCB general secretary Mahbul Anam was present at the function as chief guest while former BCB vice-president Aziz Al Kaiser was the special guest.

They distributed the crests to the winners.

Srikanth new chief selector?

PTI, Mumbai

The senior selection panel of the Indian Cricket Board is poised to undergo a complete overhaul at Saturday's AGM with former Test captain Krishnamachari Srikanth likely to replace incumbent chief selector Dilip Vengsarkar.

Chennai-born Srikanth (South Zone) could have as co-selectors his former India teammate Yashpal Sharma (North), former Test leg-spinner Narendra Hirwani (Central), Surendra Bhawe (West) and Raja Venkat (East), BCCI sources said.

This is a complete change from the current selection panel comprising Vengsarkar (West), Venkatapathy Raju (South), Ranjib Biswal (East), Sanjay Jagdale (Central) and Bhupinder Singh Sr (North).

The BCCI's Working Committee, at its last sitting, had decided that no office bearer of the Board or any of its affiliated units can become a selector in future.

This decision, expected to be passed at the AGM, will rule out Vengsarkar, Raju and Biswal who are office bearers of their respective cricket associations -- Mumbai, SEE PAGE 18 COL 5

Australia open against RCA

PTI, Jaipur

Australia begin their competitive cricket in their four-Tests tour of India with a two-day practice game against Rajasthan Cricket Association's Centre of Excellence team at Sawai Mansingh Stadium here Saturday.

Since arriving here on Monday, the World Champions had been camping here to acclimatise with Indian conditions with the RCA generously opening doors of its state-of-the-art Future Cricket Academy, which has 24 different outdoor pitches of every kind besides five artificial pitches.

After four days of practice, Ricky Ponting and his boys will gear up to the competition mode against a team led by former India One-Day player Gagan Khoda.

Another former India ODI player Venugopal Rao was to captain the RCA side but he will miss SEE PAGE 18 COL 5

Dramatic Arambagh win

SPORTS REPORTER



Muktijodha's financial battle looked to come to an end with the arrival of team sponsors for the season but the giants kept struggling for form as they suffered their third consecutive defeat in the Citycell B. League yesterday.

After losses to Khulna and Chittagong Abahani in the first two rounds, the Reds failed to hold on to a first-half lead as Arambagh dramatically came from behind to win 2-1 at the Bangabandhu National Stadium.

Ajmal Hossain Biddut put Muktijodha head from a penalty but strikes from Imrul Hassan and Sirajul Karim inside the last five minutes sealed Arambagh's first win.

Arambagh, who crashed 3-0 to Mohammedan in their first game after sitting out in the opening round, dominated the show but almost paid heavily for pathetic finishing.

The match was interrupted twice in the second half, 17 minutes for bad light and heavy rain and a further 16 minutes for another spell of showers and Arambagh's refusal to play.

However, Arambagh's decision to resume the game after the second stoppage with just eight minutes remaining on the clock earned

them full three points.

Arambagh got off to a bright start but Muktijodha strung passes together to take control and win a penalty in the 28th minute when Kanchan was tripped by Arambagh captain Akram inside the area.

Biddut converted the spotkick, putting his shot effortlessly past goalkeeper Piru but that was the Reds' last attempt on rival goal before the break.

Kenyan striker Nicodemus and substitute Liberian forward Jerry Weah got enough opportunities to equalise but never threatened Mustaq's goal.

Nicodemus got the best chance on the stroke of halftime when he took a pass from Weah but his thundering drive from 15 yards, a delayed effort, was blocked by outrushing Mustaq, the BKSP custodian who replaced an out-of-form Nizam Majumder.

Arambagh pressed hard after the break but rightback Monu's darting runs as Weah placed the ball wide of the empty net in the 51st minute.

Former national fullback Titu returned to the line-up after missing the earlier games but the Muktijodha captain looked vulnerable against a barrage of attacks at the left side of their defence. He was beaten again in the 64th minute but this time, Roni made a goalline clearance after Nicodemus flicked Weah's pass.

After the first stoppage, Mustaq lost a freekick by Monu from his grip but Nicodemus, standing at the far post, mishit his chance under pressure from two rival defenders.

Muktijodha's inexperienced defence was in total shambles and the pressure finally told in the 86th minute.

Nayan drilled a superb through down the middle to fellow midfielder Imrul who got inside the box and before the four rival defenders could react, drove a left-footer into the roof of the net to equalise.

Nicodemus, despite all his woes, had a hand in the match winner in the 90th minute when he cut back a low cross from the right. Substitute Turjo failed to control the ball on the waterlogged pitch but helped on a backpass towards the path of an onrushing Sirajul, who stormed in a rising right-footer past Mustaq on the trot to make it 2-1.

In the injury time, Muktijodha came close to get the equaliser but substitute Walid, taking a through-pass from Kanchan, fired onto the near post. Biddut then unleashed a curling shot from 20 yards but Piru made a spectacular one-handed save for a corner, which eventually was the last action of the match.

Pointless Muktijodha face a difficult task to move from bottom-table when the league, which goes into a 9-day break for Eidul Fitr SEE PAGE 18 COL 5



Muktijodha midfielder Biddut (2nd R) battles for possession with Arambagh defender Kaba during their Citycell B. League match at the Bangabandhu National Stadium yesterday.

Australia A drub hosts

Cricket

CRICINFO, undated

The 15000-odd spectators who showed up at the Chepauk witnessed a massive drubbing as Australia A batted India A out of the game to claim the tri-series and round off their tour on a high. The puzzling decision to put Australia in to bat on a sun-baked pitch eventually cost India as the Australians -- led by David Hussey -- seized the advantage, piled up a

challenging 303 before their express seam attack sunk India in a position from which they could salvage very little.

The Australians sensed India's weakness against genuine pace and dropped their spinner, Xavier Doherty, for Shaun Tait, and the

move paid dividends right from the start. The trio of Tait, Mark Cameron and Brett Geeves generated enough pace to rattle the top order on a pitch which still looked like a batting belt.

India had lost seven wickets within 18 overs and it was clear from the onset that they had lost the match at the toss.

Play was held up for 15 minutes after the first ball of the innings after one of the Australian fielders at the third man boundary was hit by a missile. Tait immediately fired a missile of his own when he sent back the out-of-form Dinesh Karthik with an express yorker.

Robin Uthappa eased in to some kind of rhythm with two boundaries towards third man but he too succumbed to a quick yorker, this time off Geeves. Ravi Teja fell to the extra pace and bounce from Cameron and the chase told a sorry

story at 33 for 4.

Yet again, it was left to the middle-order pair of Suresh Raina and Rohit Sharma to script a match-winning stand, and the signs were encouraging when Raina caressed Geeves past the covers. The partnership, however, lasted just five overs for Raina fell tamedly, and India's biggest hope, Yusuf Pathan, paid the price four balls later to give Ashley Noffke a double-strike.

What hurt India more than the early strikes was the lack of partnerships in the middle order. While Rohit and Raina consolidated in the middle overs on Wednesday, they failed to repeat that on Friday. Rohit continued to remain positive against the quicker bowlers -- pulling Cameron over fine leg -- but he fell when he tried the same against Geeves. Hussey rounded SEE PAGE 18 COL 6

A sentimental flick

Cricket

THE TIMES

There's something about South African heroes that makes them so tragic. We love them, yet hold them in the bitterest contempt. Perhaps it's because they hold promise of such enormous potential and then end up letting their country down so spectacularly.

Perhaps it's because they have such laudable qualities that nevertheless cannot save them when the chips are down. But, from almost every walk of life, in every period of our history, including this week's developments, the re have been classic South African heroes who have given us damn good stories.

As his official biographer, Garth King, writes, Hansie Cronje is a

name instantly recognisable the world over. Like a Shakespearean tragic hero, Hansie's compelling humanity is made so brutally evident because he falls from such lofty heights. Hansie went from hero to zero, from national role model and sporting god to international disgrace and dishonest villain in a life so unexpectedly cut short.

The roller-coaster ride of Hansie Cronje's life provides ample subject matter for a dramatic human story that is translatable into a fairly gripping film at times. Hansie, the story of a tragic sporting hero, is told by his brother Frans Cronje, which should alert audiences to the possibility of bias in the presentation of the man flawed by greed who was his own worst enemy.

Cronje is dealt with in a way that addresses the mistakes and flawed judgements that he made, but

nevertheless attempts to still portray him in a positive light. His untimely death has enabled Frans Cronje to get away with this. Hansie has already paid the ultimate price, making audiences more likely to go into the film with a good deal of sympathy and pathos.

Frank Rautenbach, who portrays Hansie, has a broad, likeable face and a beaming smile that endears him to audiences. He is gregarious in a manner expected from one of our most well known cricket captains. His performance sometimes descends into syrupy sentimentality, but he carries the role well.

US actress Sarah Thompson's role as Bertha Cronje is a let down. Her unconvincing South African accent taints her performance. Bertha's lack of any real emotion, other than unwavering support SEE PAGE 18 COL 8

Hamilton leads in practice

AFP, Singapore



World championship leader Lewis Hamilton and his nearest challenger Felipe Massa dominated the opening practice for the Singapore Grand Prix Friday, driving under lights for the first time.

The Briton pushed his McLaren around the bumpy Marina Bay street circuit in 1:45.518 to finish 0.080 of a second faster than the Ferrari-driving Brazilian, who is one point behind Hamilton with four races left.

Ferrari's defending champion Kimi Raikkonen was third fastest with Heikki Kovalainen in a McLaren fourth and BMW Sauber's Robert Kubica fifth.

Rain pelted Singapore Friday morning but it had cleared by evening with the track dry and the weather hot and humid as the drivers clocked as many laps as possible to familiarise themselves with the circuit and conditions.

Not everyone found the going easy.

Australia's Mark Webber in a Red Bull became the first Singapore casualty, crashing into the barriers on turn 18 during his fifth lap. His front right wheel was mangled but he walked away unscathed.

Several other cars had close shaves with Red Bull's David Coulthard, Toyota's Jarno Trulli, Kovalainen, Honda's Rubens Barrichello and Renault's Nelson Piquet all spinning.

Toyota's Timo Glock set the

early pace before Hamilton, Massa and Raikkonen took over.

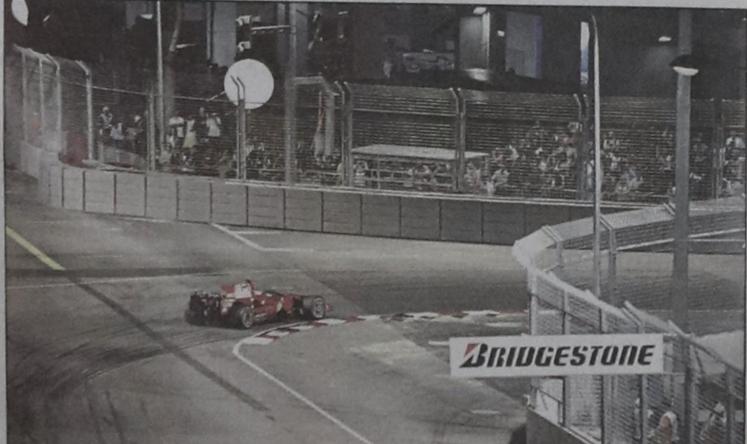
Raikkonen, 21 points behind Hamilton and needing a miracle to retain his title, struggled to find his groove before his tyres warmed up and he hit the top of the time sheets on the hour mark.

But he held the lead for just minutes with Hamilton soon taking charge, as the 23-year-old went even quicker 70 minutes into the 90 minute session on his 14th lap for the fastest time.

Massa grabbed second from Raikkonen on his last lap.

Sebastian Vettel, who stunned the field to win the last Grand Prix in Italy, came 11th in his Toro Rosso, more than two seconds behind.

A second practice session is held later Friday.



Formula One drivers take part in the first practice session at the Singapore Grand Prix on Friday ahead of the first ever night race on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP