



PHOTO: STAR

Cyclists race during the men's 170 km road race mass start event (from BKSP to Khulna) of the South Asian Games in Khulna yesterday.

SL deny India

QUAZI AMANULLAH, from Khulna



India's quest for a clean sweep in cycling shattered in a photo finish on Tuesday.

After winning the first three gold medals, the Indians wanted to sigh off from Khulna by clinching the men's 170-km road race mass start, the last event of cycling in the 11th South Asian Games.

But Sri Lanka's Janaka Hemnath Gonagalage spoiled their party by winning a thrilling contest that saw all the three medal winners reaching the finish line in 4 hours 48 minutes and 34 seconds.

Rajender Bishnoi of India won silver while Pakistan's Nisar Ahmed claimed the bronze following a ruling from the match commissioner. It may be mentioned here that in mass start fraction of second does not appear in official timing.

However, the exciting finish marked a happy end of the four-day competition after Monday's act of cheating by a Bangladeshi women cyclist during the 50-km road race mass start.

"It feels great. I will now return home with pride for winning the gold in the most arduous cycling event. It is a great moment of my life," said gold winner Janaka Hemnath.

Two Sri Lankan cyclists Sudeera Nilanga Weerasoora and Dana Stave Nugara however sustained injuries in their legs after falling at Mollahat bridge while riding their cycle at a speed of 35.35 km per hour. They were later brought to Khulna by an ambulance for treatment.

State Minister for Labour and Employment Begum Mannujan Sufian distributed prizes among the winners.

Athletes of six countries India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Afghanistan and host Bangladesh participated in cycling events that included 30 km road race time trail (women) on January 30, 80 km road race time trail (men) on January 31, 50 km road race mass start (women) on February 1.

Although Bhutan was listed in cycling, they did not take part in any of the four events.

Pakistan enter h'ball semis

SPORTS REPORTER

Pakistan moved into the semifinals in men's handball of the 11th South Asian Games with a thumping 59-14 win over Sri Lanka in their first match at the Handball Stadium yesterday.

The Pakistan win also threw India into the semis from Group A after Sri Lanka, the third team in the group, had earlier lost to India.

Pakistan dominated the game from the beginning and took a deserved 28-3 lead with Muhammad Nadeem scoring highest 13 goals, followed by Izzat Ul Haq, who found the back of Sri Lankan net nine times. Apart from them, Muhammad Shahid Pervez and Muhammad Sohob netted eight goals each.

Pahan was the most successful Sri Lankan scorer, with five goals.

In the second match, Nepal defeated Afghanistan 33-23 in a Group B encounter after leading the first half 17-12 at the same venue.

The victory kept Nepal on course for the semifinals as Bangladesh, who beat Nepal in their first match, will take on Afghanistan in the last Group B match today.

Italy choose WC base

AFP, Rome

Defending champions Italy have chosen Southdowns College, situated between Pretoria and Johannesburg, for their World Cup base, the Italian Football Federation (FIGC) said on Tuesday.

Italy, who will stay at the Leriba Lodge luxury hotel near Pretoria for the duration of their World Cup campaign, used Southdowns as their base during their Confederations Cup campaign in 2009.

Mancini joins Milan

AFP, Rome

Serie A's runaway leaders Inter Milan permitted experienced Brazilian striker Mancini to move on loan to bitter city rivals AC Milan on Monday with an option to buy him outright.

The 29-year-old has failed to break into the Inter first team since arriving from AS Roma in the summer of 2008 and has appeared only seven times for the Italian champions this season all as a substitute at the end of the matches.

Mancini, who was also strongly courted by French giants Marseille, came to Inter on the back of several impressive seasons at Roma where they had twice finished runners-up behind Inter in the title race and reached the last eight of the Champions League on two occasions.

Mancini will join several compatriots at AC - who are second in the league table eight points behind Inter - such as goalkeeper Dida, central defender Thiago Silva, strikers Ronaldinho and Alexandre Pato, as well as coach Leonardo.

Cabanas shows improvement

AFP, Mexico

Paraguay World Cup star Salvador Cabanas is showing definite signs of improvement after being shot in the head in the toilet of a trendy Mexico City bar last week, his doctor said on Monday.

Cabanas woke up on Saturday after six days under sedation and spoke for the first time, according to Dr Ernesto Martinez, the chief of surgeons at the hospital where he underwent emergency surgery.

The 29-year-old, who plays his club football with Club America of the Mexican league, was also able to watch his team-mates win their league match 1-0 on Sunday.

"He's improving. He was very calm watching the match. He saw all the matches shown on television and at no moment did his heart-rate change," said Dr Martinez. "He's awake more, with his language more fluent and he can move his four limbs."

He added that after being on a drip the player will also try eating solids on Monday. Tests revealed a minor inflammation in the zone where the bullet, which has yet to be removed, lodged, and the doctor explained that there was still a risk of infection in the area.

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Setback in kabaddi

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh's hopes of playing the final of the men's kabaddi event of the 11th South Asian Games almost evaporated when the hosts went 11-17 down to Pakistan in their third match at the Outer Stadium Kabaddi Court yesterday.

To play the final, Bangladesh must beat India in their last group match as Pakistan will face lowly Nepal in their final match today. If Bangladesh beat India and Pakistan win against Nepal, then three teams -- Bangladesh, India and Pakistan -- will have equal three wins and the top two teams, to be decided by point difference, will play the final tomorrow.

From the word go, the hosts never looked bright on the mat and were on the back foot against Pakistan, who put up a brave show against holders India before going down 15-19 on Monday. Last Games' runners-up Pakistan, whose last defeat to Bangladesh came in the Busan Asiad in 2002, put on another spirited show in both raiding and defending their territory and took a creditable 6-3 lead in the first half only because of mistakes of the Bangladeshi raiders, who went deep into Pakistan territory and never came back to hand over two valuable points to the opponents in the first.

After resumption, Bangladesh reorganised to reduce the gap to 6-7 with substitute Raju Ahmed picking a point from the attack then caught one Pakistani inside their territory before Pakistani raiders Maqsood Ali and Wajid Ali picked up three successive points from attacks. Thereafter, Bangladesh looked desperate to reduce the gap and adopted an attacking strategy but their raiders went so deep into the Pakistani territory from where they never could come back and thus Pakistan went beyond their reach, taking a lead of 15-10 with four minutes remaining in the game.

In the last minute, Pakistan earned a creditable 10-11 to finish 17-11 to keep their hopes of playing the final.

"Actually we lacked quality players like Pakistan's Maqsood and Wajid and the boys could not justify their merit against Pakistan," said coach Abdul Jalil adding that he badly felt the absence of Bangladesh's best raider Ziaur Rahman, who watched the match from the sidelines following his knee injury.

"In a bid to reduce the gap in the second half, we adopted an attacking play and the raiders went deep but they eventually got caught," said Jalil adding that the turning point of the game was losing successive points in the second half when Maqsood picked up two points.

The Bangladesh coach also blamed poor officiating and claimed that they were deprived of two points in the first half.

After two successive defeats to Bangladesh and India, Nepal tasted their first win with a 26-16 win over Sri Lanka and confirmed bronze medal along with Bangladesh as both third and fourth teams will be awarded bronze medals.

McDonald out, Keane in

Football

AFP, Glasgow

Australia striker Scott McDonald's successful Celtic career came to an end on Monday as he joined English Championship side Middlesbrough for an undisclosed fee in a transfer deadline day move.

His departure from the Glasgow giants came as Ireland captain Robbie Keane and Senegal striker Diomansy Kamara both moved to Parkhead in loan deals from, respectively, Tottenham and Fulham.

McDonald, currently sidelined by a hernia injury, scored 50 goals in 88 league appearances for Celtic after joining the club before the start of the 2007-08 season.

He became the fifth player Boro's former Celtic boss Gordon Strachan has signed from his old club, following Barry Robson, Willo Flood, Chris Killen and Stephen McManus. Strachan further expanded his Scottish colony on Monday by signing Aberdeen forward Lee Miller.

Celtic, who appear to have been concentrating on reducing their wage bill, also tied up a deal to take Dutch international left-back Edson Braafheid, 26, on loan from Bayern Munich in order to fill the gap created by Danny Fox's move to Burnley.

Kamara, 29, has scored three goals this season in 13 appearances for Fulham, five of which came as a substitute. He told Celtic's website that he was looking to make the loan move permanent.

"Celtic is a magnificent football club," said Kamara, capped over 40 times by Senegal. "I will be looking to do my very best to contribute and bring the supporters success and hopefully enjoy a long future with the club."

Fox admitted that finance more than football was behind his move south of the border.

"I was called into the Scotland squad so I could not

have been doing too badly. I also played in the Champions League, which I enjoyed," he said.

"I think with the way Scottish football is going at the moment, financial reasons and stuff like that, Celtic were maybe offered a lot more money than they paid for me.

"It was an opportunity I couldn't really turn down myself. Players from all over the world want to come and play in the (English) Premier League."

Celtic also signed Motherwell winger Paul Slane for an undisclosed fee.

Kilmarnock, who entertain Celtic in a league match on Tuesday, signed Watford duo Scott Severin and Rob Kiernan and Aberdeen striker Chris

Maguire on loan until the end of the season.

Aberdeen meanwhile signed Plymouth pair Steven MacLean, a striker, and Jim Paterson, a left-sided defender/midfielder on loan until the end of the season.

Dons boss Mark McGhee said he hoped MacLean would plug the gap created by Miller's departure.

"We need somebody - particularly now that Lee has gone - to link the play, to be a centre-forward that can hold the ball up for us. Steven MacLean's a boy that can take it in, and he's got a good goalscoring record."

Both players go straight into the squad for Tuesday's SPL match against Falkirk.



PHOTO: AFP

Brazil forward Robinho acknowledges the fans upon his arrival at the Vila Belmiro Stadium in Santos on Monday. The Manchester City star returned home to his former club Santos on a six-month loan deal.

Mixed day in badminton

SPORTS REPORTER

After clinching bronze medals in both women and men's team events, Bangladesh shuttlers made disappointing starts in the women and men's singles of the 11th South Asian Games at the newly-built Wooden Floor Stadium yesterday.

Bangladesh, however, moved into the semifinals of the mixed doubles event as the Shapla-Rasel Kabir pair handed a 2-1 defeat to Sri Lankan pair of Lekha Shehani and Dinuka Karunaratne.

The Bangladeshi pair won the first set 21-19 before going down 15-21 in the second. But they finally confirmed the last four berth winning the third and final set 22-20.

Bangladesh also were in with a very good chance of advancing into the semifinals in the men's doubles, but Ahsan Habib Parash retired hurt in the middle of the deciding third set and Sri Lanka were declared winners.

Parash and Rasel Kabir lost the first set to Sri Lankan Diluka Karunaratne and Dinuka Karunaratne 14-21 before bouncing back to win the second 21-18. But Parash got hurt attempting to return a shot from the sideline with Sri Lanka leading the set 10-6. It was learnt that Parash had been ruled out for six months following the knee injury he sustained.

In the men's singles, Rais Uddin won the preliminary round with a 21-7, 16-21 and 21-16 win over Nepalese Ratnajit Tamang before losing to Indian Chetan Anand 21-19 and 21-10 in the next round. Saif Uddin lost his first round game to Sri Lankan E Niluka Karunaratne by 21-11 and 21-10.

In the women's singles, Rozina Akter lost to Pakistani Palwasha Bashir 21-9 and 21-12 while Alina Sultana lost to Sri Lankan Thilini Jayasinghe 21-16, 21-11.

Del Bosque opens WC door for Guti

AFP, Madrid

Spain coach Vicente del Bosque believes there may be a place for Real Madrid midfielder Guti in his World Cup squad after the 33-year-old's return to form.

A sublime backheel by Guti set up French striker Karim Benzema to score against Deportivo La Coruna at the weekend, winning him praise in the Spanish media just weeks after he appeared to be out of favour with Real coach Manuel Pellegrini.

Guti himself said he still hopes to play for Spain in the World Cup in South Africa despite his age and the strong competition for midfield places.

"What he said is good," Del Bosque told the sports daily Marca on Tuesday. "That means he's motivated. The door is open to his joining the squad. I look at a player's current form."

A product of Real's youth system and one of the longest-serving members of Real's squad, Guti has 15 caps for Spain but last played for the national team in 2005.

He did not feature for Real for more than two months following a bust-up with Pellegrini during the club's embarrassing 4-0 Spanish Cup defeat against third-division side Alcorcon on October 27.

Hosts fall to Pakistan

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh went down 3-0 to Pakistan in hockey of the 11th South Asian (SA) Games at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

A listless performance lacking the cutting edge gave an easy win to Pakistan who looked better equipped both physically and technically against the hosts. Bangladesh created very little in open play and missed a string of chances from penalty corners, while Pakistan capitalised on the few chances they created to script the convincing win.

Pakistan defender Wasif Siddique converted two penalty corners in the second half after Abdul Qayyum had given them a first half lead with a superlative solo effort the 20th minute. This win put Pakistan in pole position for a place in the final while Bangladesh now must beat both Nepal and India to stand any chance of making it to the gold-deciding match.

Bangladesh coach Gerhard Peter Rach seemed satisfied with what he saw from his boys. "We played better hockey than them. We created a lot more chances than they did. It's a pity we couldn't score," was the analysis of the German coach.

"We are still a very young side, but we are improving with every game. We played much better today than we did against Sri Lanka. So, I'm satisfied with the effort, may be not with the outcome."

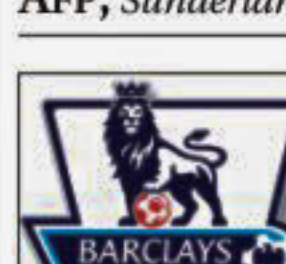


PHOTO: STAR

Action from the South Asian Games hockey match between Bangladesh and Pakistan at the Maulana Bhashani Stadium yesterday.

Stoke hold Sunderland

AFP, Sunderland



Sunderland failed to halt their slide towards the relegation quagmire after Stoke claimed a deserved point in an uninspiring goalless stalemate here on Monday.

The draw means Steve Bruce's side, which started the season in such promising fashion they were being tipped as contenders for Europe, have now won only once in their last 14 league matches and they are just four points above the bottom three.

Stoke had the better of the chances, with former Sunderland player Dean Whitehead enjoying a couple of good chances, although the hosts could justifiably claim they had been denied a second-half penalty following an apparent handball by Robert Huth.

Whitehead had the best chance of a lacklustre opening period with less than three minutes on the clock.

The forward did well to get clear of the home side's backline but his tame shot was comfortably smothered by Scotland goalkeeper Craig Gordon.

Kenwyne Jones forced Thomas Sorensen into his first save of the evening in the 10th minute but the Trinidad and Tobago forward could not generate enough power in his shot after Michael Turner had headed down Andy Reid's free-kick invitingly.

Steed Malbranque was narrowly off target

and it required a smart clearance from Ryan Shawcross to prevent Darren Bent from opening the scoring.

Bent then created an opening for Malbranque with a cute dummy but the Frenchman's shot did not seriously test Sorensen.

Whitehead was fortunate that referee Howard Webb appeared to be in a lenient mood, dispensing only a booking after the Stoke player kicked out at Lee Cattermole following a robust challenge from Sunderland's midfield enforcer.

Sunderland had just about edged the first half on points, but Stoke should have taken the lead after generating two good chances in quick succession in the opening minutes of the second half.

Mamady Sidibe almost converted following a chipped Glenn Whelan free-kick, then Whitehead attempted to drill home the loose ball only for John Mensah to deflect it over the crossbar.

Sunderland had a strong penalty appeal turned down just after the hour mark when Huth appeared to stop Bent's lofted pass with his arm.

But Stoke might easily have emerged with all three points after Ricardo Fuller was sent clear with nine minutes left. The striker had only Gordon to beat but the Scots stopper stood firm to deny him, ensuring a result which was probably just about right.

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