

BFF starts naturalisation process

Bangoura, Yussif, Chigozie give their go-ahead

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) yesterday started the official procedure of naturalising three African footballers in order to make them eligible for the Bangladesh national team.

The federation held talks with the three booters -- Ghana's Samad Yussif, Guinea's Ismael Bangoura and Nigeria's Kingsley Chigozie -- heard their demands and acquired their signatures on the provided forms, which will be forwarded to the home ministry within a couple of days to expedite the process.

The three booters in question are already eligible to apply for Bangladeshi citizenship since each of them has already spent more than four years continuously in this country. If the home ministry is convinced, the procedure of naturalisation may take one month in the least and six months at most. If citizenship is awarded, the federation will then apply to the FIFA Status Committee to make them eligible to represent Bangladesh national team.

BFF general secretary Abu Nayeem Shohag, who was present in the meeting, reiterated that



(L-R) Samad Yussif, Ismael Bangoura and Kingsley Chigozie speak to the Bangladesh Football Federation officials during their meeting at the federation yesterday.

PHOTO: BFF

acquiring citizenship will not necessarily mean these three players will walk into the national team.

"As per earlier talks between head coach Lodewijk de Kruif and the three players, we sat today and took their consent. However, awarding nationality doesn't mean they will get chance to play directly in the national team. They will be included in preliminary squad and then they will have to prove themselves to be included in the final squad," Shohag said.

The players themselves were very positive about the prospect of getting Bangladeshi citizenship

and representing this country at the international stage.

"We have seen something positive in the meeting and requested them (BFF) to start the process of the naturalisation," said Chigozie, who currently plays for Sheikh Russel KC.

Yussif, who has been playing for Abahani for the past seven seasons, said he feels at home in Bangladesh and will give his full effort if given the opportunity.

"Bangladesh is like my second home. I stay here seven to eight months while spending rest of the time in Spain. As a professional

player, I give full effort on the pitch for my club and there will be no shortage of effort when I play for the national team," said the centre-back, who is the oldest of the three at 31 years of age.

Bangoura, who is currently playing for Mohammedan and has already scored nine goals in the ongoing premier league, said he is eager to play for Bangladesh.

"We have had a good interaction with the BFF officials about the nationality. I have agreed because I want to play for Bangladesh national team and want to stay with Bangladesh

football," said the Guinean.

However, the booters stated their queries regarding the nature of nationality, the incentives that they might receive from BFF, their status in the next domestic league and whether they will be provided with air tickets to travel to their native countries. The BFF officials promised to provide them the same facilities that the local players of the national team receive when they are with the national team while promising that they might get extra benefits provided that they produce some good performances for the team.

Blind new Dutch coach

AFP, The Hague

Danny Blind was named as new Netherlands coach on Wednesday, taking over from Guus Hiddink who left the post with the Dutch team struggling to qualify for Euro 2016.

"Danny Blind has been appointed as new coach of the Dutch eleven, starting from August 1," the Royal Dutch Football Federation (KNVB) said in a statement.

Hiddink stepped down Monday following a string of disappointing performances in the Oranje's qualifying campaign for next year's championship in France.

With four matches remaining, Holland are third in qualifying Group A with 10 points, three points behind the Czech Republic and five adrift of surprise leaders Iceland.

Bayern snap up Costa

AFP, Berlin

Bayern Munich completed their first big transfer of the off-season on Wednesday by signing Brazil international Douglas Costa from Ukraine side Shakhtar Donetsk for a reported 30 million euros (\$33.3m).

The fleet-footed winger or striker has signed a five-year deal with the German champions and will battle for a place on the left wing with Franck Ribery, who is struggling with a persistent ankle injury.

Costa is the fourth most expensive signing in Bayern's history after Javi Martinez (who cost 40 million euros), Mario Goetze (37 million) and Mario Gomez (35 million).

L'pool seal Clyne deal

AFP, London

Nathaniel Clyne has become the latest pre-season arrival at Anfield after Liverpool confirmed on Wednesday they had signed the England defender from Premier League rivals Southampton.

British media outlets reported that Clyne had signed a five-year deal worth £10 million (\$16 million, 14 million euros) up front, with add-ons for the 24-year-old set to cost Liverpool a further £2 million.

Mesmerising Messi

REUTERS, Concepcion

 As Lionel Messi has developed during his career he has become an ever-more prolific provider of assists as well as a lethal goalscorer and he gave another wonderful display of creativity at the Copa America on Tuesday.

The Argentina forward, who has yet to find the net from open play in five games at the tournament in Chile, set up three goals for his team mates in a 6-1 drubbing of Paraguay that secured a clash against the hosts in Saturday's final.

It was the first time Messi made three assists in a single game for his country and only the second time in his career after he achieved the feat playing for Barcelona in a King's

Cup match against Levante in January 2014.

The 28-year-old has 31 assists for club and country so far in 2014-15, two short of his record of 33 from 2011-12.

"It really doesn't bother me that I am not scoring," Messi told reporters after the match in Concepcion.

"Hopefully my goal will come in the final," he added.

"The important thing is to lift the national team as high as possible and it doesn't matter who gets the goals."

Messi is attempting to win the Copa America to cap a superb season when he helped Barca win a treble of Champions League and domestic league and Cup titles.

He has bounced back in style from a disappointing 2013-14 campaign, when Barca failed to collect major silverware and Argentina were

beaten 1-0 by Germany in the World Cup final.

Argentina are trying to win the Copa America for the first time since 1993, having lost to Brazil in 2004 and 2007 before being knocked out on penalties in the quarterfinals on home soil in 2011.

"Winning the Copa America would round off something spectacular," Messi said.

"I think we are coming into the match in good shape, but we will be playing a team with very good individual players."

"Both sides always try to play good football and not leave the opponent any time on the ball."

If he wants to score in Saturday's final, Messi knows the man in the Chile goal he will have to beat very well: Barcelona team mate Claudio Bravo.



Argentina superstar Lionel Messi (R) runs past Paraguay defenders during their Copa America semifinal in Concepcion on Tuesday.

PHOTO: AFP

Juve reject Barca's €80m Pogba bid

GOAL.COM

Juventus director general Giuseppe Marotta has confirmed the club have rejected an €80 million bid from Barcelona for Paul Pogba.

On Wednesday, Barcelona directors Ariredo Braida and Alberto Soler flew to Italy for a meeting with Marotta and Bianconeri sporting director Fabio Paratici before making their opening offer.

"Barcelona offered us €80m for Pogba but we don't want to sell him," Marotta told Gazzetta dello Sport.

Pogba has emerged as Barcelona's primary transfer target this summer, despite the club being banned from signing new players until January 2016.

With the Camp Nou presidential elections taking place in just over two weeks, all the candidates -- including current incumbent Josep Maria Bartomeu and former chief Joan Laporta -- want to buy Pogba now and register him for the start of the 2016-17 season.

Rakib leads rating chess

SPORTS REPORTER

GM Abdullah Al-Rakib took solo lead at the close of the sixth round of the Walton International Rating Chess Tournament yesterday.

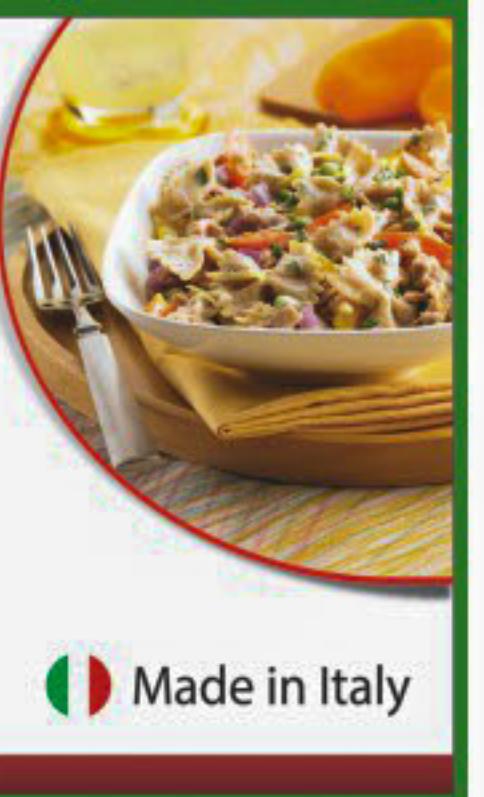
Rakib beat FM Mehdi Hasan Parag to earn maximum six points from as many games.

Ten players were in second position with five points each.

The Italian Taste Since 1898



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Novak, Maria breeze thru'

AFP, London

Novak Djokovic and Maria Sharapova breezed through at a sweltering Wimbledon on Wednesday where temperatures soared to a record 35.7 degrees while injury-plagued Japanese star Kei Nishikori was forced to withdraw.

Defending champion and top seed Djokovic reached the third round with a 6-4, 6-2, 6-3 victory over Jarkko Nieminen which brought down the curtain on the Finn's All England Club career.

Djokovic will take on Australian 27th seed Bernard Tomic for a place in the last 16 as the Serb continues his bid to win a third Wimbledon and ninth Grand Slam crown.

"It was his last Wimbledon so I congratulated him on a great career," said Djokovic after firing 36 winners.

"He's been around for many years and he's one of the nicest guys off the court and a great fighter on it. It was a pleasure to play him."

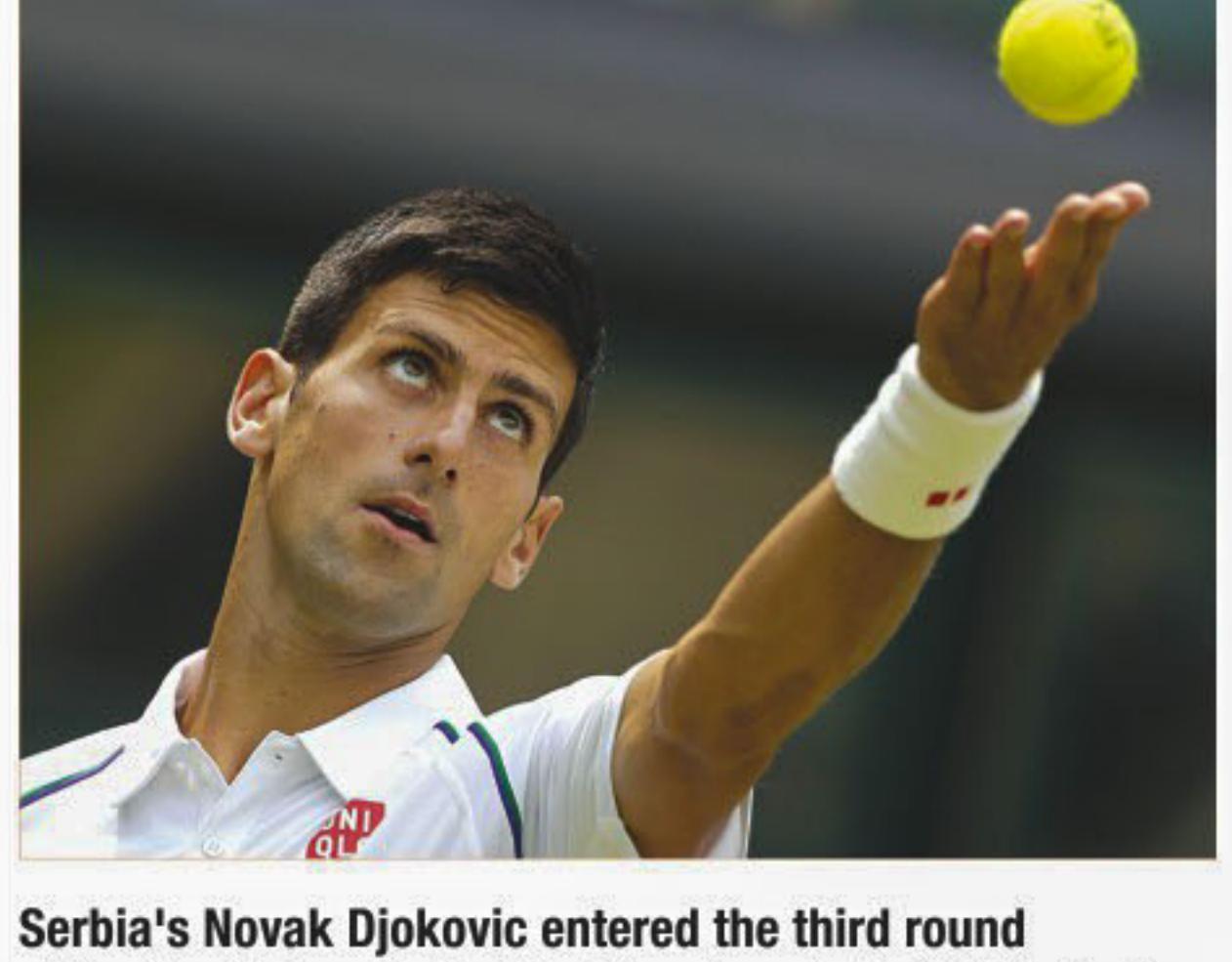
Tomic made the third round by defeating Pierre-Hugues Herbert of France, 7-6 (7/3), 6-4, 7-6 (7/5).

Fourth seeded Sharapova, the 2004 champion, outclassed Dutch qualifier Richel Hogenkamp 6-3, 6-1 in just over an hour and next faces Romanian 29th seed Irina-Camelia Begu in the third round.

Fifth-seeded Nishikori had been scheduled to face Colombian world number 60 Santiago Giraldo on Centre Court for a place in the last 32. But the 25-year-old admitted that the left calf injury he suffered last month in Halle was still a factor during his five-set win over Simone Bolelli in the first round at Wimbledon on Monday.

Nick Kyrgios, the temperamental Australian who knocked out Rafael Nadal last year, ranted and raved at officials for the second match in succession as he beat Argentina's Juan Monaco 7-6 (7/5), 6-3, 6-4.

The 26th seed faces Canadian seventh seed Milos Raonic who hit the third fastest serve in tournament history of 145mph in his 6-0, 6-2, 6-7 (5/7), 7-6 (7/4) win over 37-year-old German Tommy Haas.



Serbia's Novak Djokovic entered the third round defeating Finland's Jarkko Nieminen in their Wimbledon match yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Rivaldo slams 'ugly' Brazil

GOAL.COM

Brazil legend Rivaldo has slated the selection process for the national team in the aftermath of their early Copa America exit.

Dunga's men crashed out of the tournament when they lost to Paraguay on penalties at the quarterfinal stage, sparking criticism back home.

The inclusion of players such as Everton Ribeiro and Diego Tardelli -- who play in UAE and China respectively -- seem to have rubbed Rivaldo the wrong way as he suggested the selection process has regressed since his omission from the 2006 World Cup at the age of 34.

"On Tuesday it was 13 years since Brazil won its fifth World Cup, I will never forget that moment," the 43-year-old, who was an integral part of that Selecao side, wrote on his official Facebook page.

"But, nowadays, it seems that any player can be called to the national team. I remember that in 2006 I wasn't called to the World Cup because I was playing club football in Greece even though I was rated as the best player of the league on two occasions."

"If the state of affairs continues like this, our national team will end up going over 30 years without being champions. Please, can we call up better players because if we don't - we will be ashamed again."

"I prefer to stay silent and not say anything, but this time I couldn't keep quiet because things are really ugly right now as a country."



6-star Argentina in final

AFP, Concepcion

Lionel Messi produced a scintillating individual performance as Argentina destroyed Paraguay 6-1 to reach the final of the Copa America here Tuesday.

The Barcelona superstar tormented Paraguay mercilessly as the favourites produced their best display of the tournament and advanced to a showdown with Chile in Saturday's final.

Although Messi failed to end his run of more than 900 minutes without an international goal from open play, he turned creator as Argentina

tore Paraguay apart.

Goals from Angel Di Maria (2), Marcos Rojo, Javier Pastore, Sergio Aguero and Gonzalo Higuain completed an emphatic rout for the South American giants.

A satisfied Messi was delighted Argentina's potent collection of attacking talent finally appears to have clicked with Saturday's final looming.

"We've been playing well -- we knew once we scored one goal, many more would come, and that's what happened," said Messi as he collected his man-of-the-match award.

Argentina, who finished runners-up in last year's World Cup, are determined to clinch a first major title in

22 years at the Copa America.

"The important thing is that we've achieved our first objective by reaching final. Now we need to win it," Messi said.

Manchester United defender Rojo and Paris Saint-Germain's Pastore had given Argentina a 2-0 lead midway through the first half before Paraguay pulled one back through Lucas Barrios.

But any Paraguayan hopes of repeating their heroics in the group phase -- when they came back from two goals down to draw 2-2 -- were snuffed out by two goals in six minutes from Di Maria early in the second half.