

SPORT



South Africa pacer Kagiso Rabada (L) celebrates one off his three scalps on the first day of the second Test against England in Cape Town yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

Tigers begin fitness camp today

SPORTS REPORTER

Players included in the 27-member preliminary squad which was announced last week will assemble for the first time at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium today as they are scheduled to attend a fitness session with national team strength and conditioning coach Mario Villavarayan.

All the players of the squad, except for Shakib Al Hasan, will be available today. Shakib is currently on a break and is in America with his family.

The conditioning session is a prelude of sorts to the start of the national camp. The players are expected to attend a couple more sessions before they begin working on their respective skills.

The national players have a busy schedule ahead with a series against Zimbabwe, the Asia Cup and the ICC World Twenty 20 lined up.

Their first focus of course will be the series against Zimbabwe, which is expected to begin in the second week of January.

Emily, Mithun return

SPORTS REPORTER

Striking pair Zahid Hasan Emily and Mithun Chowdhury and midfielder Alamgir Kabir Rana have been called up for the national football team ahead of Bangladeshu Gold Cup, beginning from January 8.

The trio will join the 20-member squad which recently played in the SAFF Suzuki Cup in India. The booters will leave for Jessore tomorrow afternoon after having a practice session in the morning.

Emily was dropped from the India-bound team at the eleventh hour last month after failing to recover from a meniscus injury even though he had been struggling to find place in the team after his last international match against Jordan in March 24, 2015.

Mithun, who last played for the national team in last year's Bangabandhu Gold Cup in February, has been called up after nearly one year. Alamgir Kabir Rana played for the national team in the AFC Challenge Cup Qualifiers in 2013.

80,000 at the MCG!

AGENCIES, Melbourne

Australia's Big Bash League had a landmark day yesterday as a crowd of 80,883 people packed into the Melbourne Cricket Ground for the Melbourne derby -- played between the Stars and Renegades.

At the start of the game, there were about 55,000 people while the rest formed lines outside Yarra Park, with strict security measures on display. To accommodate the swarm, the MCC had to open the members' reserve to all comers and remove a promotional banner that initially covered one bank of seats.

The unexpected number of guests caused a few problems, such as the vendors running out of food and drink shortly after the innings.

"To have more than 80,000 people at the MCG for the local Melbourne derby, then to witness a sell out in Perth for a re-match of last year's final, all on the same day, was a genuine milestone in the short history of the league," said CA's Mike McKenna

Bangladesh to host next SAFF

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh have been awarded the rights to host the 2017 SAFF Championship as well as the inaugural Club Cup Championship later this year.

The decisions were made at the executive committee meeting of the South Asian Football Federation (SAFF) in Trivandrum yesterday.

Maldives were the lone competitor against Bangladesh in bidding for the next edition of the SAFF Championship, scheduled to be held in December, after Bhutan had pulled out of their initial bid.

"Bangladesh and Maldives bid for hosting the 2017 SAFF Championship, and the executive committee meeting awarded Bangladesh the rights through discussion as well as based on the opinion of the sponsors (World Sports Group)," SAFF general secretary Anwarul Haq Helal told The Daily Star over phone from Trivandrum yesterday.

It will be the third time that Bangladesh will host the championship, after having hosted the showpiece event in 2003 and 2009. Bangladesh clinched the title in the 2003 edition but were eliminated from the semifinals of the 2009 edition.

Helal, a former general secretary of Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF),

informed that Bangladesh have also been proposed about hosting the inaugural edition of Club Cup Championship, which is expected to be held at the end of this year. There was no representative from Bangladesh present at the meeting.

"I did not think that the sponsors would agree to award it to Bangladesh. I agreed on principle to hosting the Club Cup Championship which was my dream as the SAFF president to introduce in this region like in Europe. However, they have finally agreed to hold the club championship. I will sit with the board (BFF executive committee) within the next 48 hours to take a final decision," said BFF president Kazi Salahuddin, who is also the president of SAFF.

The SAFF Championship and Club Cup Championship will be held in every alternative year, said Salahuddin, who did not attend the meeting due to his engagement with this month's Bangabandhu Gold Cup.

Helal also informed that India were awarded the hosting rights for SAFF Women's Championship in August-September this year but they did not discuss the issue regarding whether Afghanistan, who have already joined Central Asian Football Association, will be allowed to take part in the next SAFF Championship.

Mehidy exudes confidence

SPORTS REPORTER



Bangladesh Under-19 technical advisor Stuart Law is set to arrive in Dhaka today to join the team's preparation for the Under-19 World Cup, which is due to begin on January 27.

Law will be a part of the team when it plays its first match against South Africa in Chittagong and remain with the youngsters throughout the mega event.

The Under-19 players are currently on a short break and will resume training tomorrow. Their skipper Mehidy Hasan Miraz though, was present at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday in order to fulfil certain duties related to the promotional activities of the event.

Speaking to reporters yesterday, the youngster exuded confidence.

"I believe that if we can maintain our current training standard then we can become champions. I want to take it step by step. Our first job will be to win the first three matches and progress to the quarterfinals. We will think about the rest from there," said Miraz.

Bangladesh will face South Africa, Scotland and Namibia in the group stages of the competition. Having beaten South Africa a number of times in the recent past, both at home and away, Bangladesh are favourites to go through.

We have seen many players join the national team from the under-19 level, however, the team has never managed to win the competition; and that's something that the team management believes it can do this time.

"The coach, the team management and the members of the BCB, everyone wants the trophy to stay at home and we want to fulfil their desire. We need everyone's prayers," said Miraz.

Bangladesh U-19s will play their West Indian counterparts in a three-match ODI series beginning on January 11 in order to prepare for the World Cup.

SAFF Suzuki Cup India-Afghan final today

SPORTS REPORTER

Hosts and six-time champions India will face reigning champions Afghanistan in the final of the Suzuki SAFF Cup at the Greenfield Stadium in Trivandrum today.

This will be the third consecutive time that the two South Asian giants will line up in the final of the competition, with India running out 4-0 winners in the 2011 edition before the Afghans exacted revenge with a 2-0 win two years later.

The Lions of Khorasan are favourites going into this match on the back of some outstanding performances. They began their campaign with a 4-0 win over Bangladesh, followed by a 3-0 win over Bhutan before another comfortable 4-1 victory over Maldives. Afghanistan breezed past Sri Lanka with a 5-0 win in the semifinal.

India, meanwhile, have had a rougher road to the final. They scraped past Nepal 1-0 in their opening game before overcoming Sri Lanka 2-0 to set up a semifinal clash against Maldives whom they beat 3-2 in an enthralling affair.

Although Afghanistan will be going into the match high on confidence, India will be looking to take full advantage as the home side. The match will kick off at 19:00 BST.

Chayan, Rana dropped

SPORTS REPORTER



Penalty-corner specialist Mamunur Rahman Chayan has been dropped from the national hockey team after 11 years as coach Mahbub Harun yesterday picked an 18-member squad for next month's South Asian (SA) Games.

It's not only Chayan, but also experienced midfielder Kamruzzaman Rana who did not even secure a place in the four-member stand-by list. Chayan was dropped for lack of fitness as well as poor performance in training while Rana was dropped due to lack of fitness and a knee injury.

"The fitness of both of the players is not up to the mark. Rana has been also suffering from knee injury. Junior player Ashraf Islam is doing better than Chayan, who is failing to convert penalty corners in the practice sessions," said Harun, adding that they are hoping to produce better results than the bronze-medal-winning performance in

the 2010 SA Games.

Chayan was a bit surprised to be axed from the team which he represented last in the World Hockey League (Round-2) in January last year.

"I was satisfied with my performance at the training camp, but maybe I could not satisfy the selectors and coaches. I hope those who have been picked up will give their best," said Chayan adding that he has lost 10 to 12 kilos in training.

Midfielder Sarwar Hossain was named the captain of the team while goalkeeper Ashim Gope was appointed his deputy.

SQUAD: Ashim Gope, Zahid Hossain, Ashraf Islam, Imran Hasan Pintoo, Rezaul Karim Babu, Farhad Ahmmad Shitul, Khorshedur Rahman, Taposh Barman, Sarwar Hossain, Hasan Jubair Niloy, Roman Sarker, Fazle Hossain Rabbi, Sabbir Hossain, Moinal Hossain Kaushik, Pushkar Khisa Mimo, Rasel Mahmud Jimmy, Milon Hossain, Krishna Kumar Das.

STAND-BY: Abu Sayeed Nippon, Belal Hossain, Nayeem Uddin, Deen Islam Emon.



Bangladesh Football Federation president Kazi Salahuddin (3rd from L) and Saif Power Tec's managing director Tarafder Ruhul Amin (3rd from R) visit the BFF Academy in Sylhet yesterday. PHOTO: STAR

Holder wants to finish on a high

AFP, Sydney



The West Indies have gained some confidence out of their series loss to Australia and are looking to finish their underwhelming tour on a high in the final Sydney Test, captain Jason Holder said Saturday.

The eighth-ranked Windies were trounced in the first two Tests in Hobart and Melbourne with the Australians yet to be dismissed and conceding only 10 wickets in the thumpings.

The West Indies, who will be playing in their first Test at the Sydney Cricket Ground in 15 years, symbolising their declining reputation, will be trying to prevent the Australians from sweeping the series and possibly returning to the top of the Test rankings.

on tour, although they have a scant winning chance against Steve Smith's team.

In a sign of the vast gulf between the two sides in this series, Australia have scored 131.30 runs per wicket loss to the West Indies' 24.31.

"We fought really well in the last two days of the last Test match and it gives us some confidence going into this one," Holder told reporters.

"It is important that we build on that and make sure we finish this Test match on a high."

"It just shows what we can do when we actually stick it out."

Holder said his bowlers needed to improve for the Sydney finale.

"We have basically leaked runs both sides of the wicket," he said.

"We need our bowlers to be a lot more disciplined. I have spoken about it from the first Test match and we got a little better in the second Test match but we are nowhere near where we are supposed to be."

BJMC retain women's h'ball title

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation (BJMC) retained the title of Exim Bank National Women's Handball Championship with a 28-19 win over Bangladesh Ansar in the final at the Sheheed (captain) M Mansur Ali National Handball Stadium yesterday. It was BJMC's ninth title overall. Shirin of BJMC, who scored 10 goals out of 28 in the final, was named the best player of the championship.

Bangladesh Police finished third after beating Naogaon 14-7 in the place-deciding match.

'BFF academy to restart by April'

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) president Kazi Salahuddin, along with the managing director of probable sponsors Saif Power Tec Ltd, paid a brief visit to the BFF academy in Sylhet yesterday in a bid to resuming its activities which have remained suspended for the last four months.

All the players of the academy, which partially started its activities in November, 2014, were released after the SAFF U-16 Championship in August last year in a bid to allowing them to sit for their exams. However, since then the academy, which is funded by the FIFA Goal project, remained closed and the issue of a restart rose after the national football team's failure in the SAFF Suzuki Cup.

"We saw the state of the academy today [Saturday]. It will take two to three months to bring the academy at world standard and to do this, we need investment which we have already managed," said Salahuddin over phone.

"The coaching staff will be available within the next two months and we can hope that we can resume the academy by April," said the BFF president, adding that they would sign an agreement with Saif Power Tec within a couple of weeks.

It has been learnt that Saif Power Tec will provide financial assistance to groom footballers, who will then be traded to clubs and the profit will be shared between the BFF and the sponsors.

England 317 for 5

REUTERS, Cape Town

Ben Stokes struck a sparkling unbeaten 74 to help England finish the opening day of the second Test against South Africa on a healthy 317 for five at Newlands on Saturday.

Stokes top-scored for the touring side with Alex Hales and Joe Root also contributing half-centuries and Jonny Bairstow ending on 39 not out in an unbroken sixth-wicket partnership of 94.

Stokes took to the tiring South African bowling in the last hour of a hot day, seeing off the threat of the new ball with a cavalier approach that gave the advantage to England who lead the four-Test series 1-0.

Hales, in his second Test, was out for 60 to a sharp catch from AB de Villiers in the slips after getting an edge to a lifting ball from Mome Morkel.

His patient innings off 140 balls should, however, allow him more time to cement a regular role as captain Alastair Cook's opening partner.

Root made 50 before giving debutant Chris Morris his first test wicket when he nibbled at a ball and was caught behind by wicketkeeper Quinton de Kock.

Nick Compton was five runs short of his 50 when he pulled the injured Dale Steyn, took two wickets in as many balls either side of the interval.

SCORES IN BRIEF
ENGLAND: First innings 317 for 5 (Cook 27, Hales 60, Compton 45, Root 50, Stokes 74 not out, Bairstow

NZ-SL 4th ODI abandoned

AFP, Nelson

The fourth ODI between New Zealand and Sri Lanka was abandoned Saturday after heavy rain allowed only nine overs to be bowled.

The start of the match was delayed nearly five hours because of the weather.

New Zealand were 75-3 after being sent in to bat when the rain started again and the umpires called the game off.

New Zealand have an unbeatable 2-1 lead in the series with the fifth and final match to be played in Mount Maunganui on Tuesday.