

Hockey team leaving for Europe today

SPORTS REPORTER



The national hockey team will leave today for Europe to play nine practice matches against Poland and Austria as part of the team's preparation for November's AHF Cup.

Of the 19-member squad, nine players are already in Germany playing for different German clubs, and they will join the squad in Poland. Local coach Mahbub Harun and BHF members Ehsan Rana and Arif Islam Prince will accompany the squad during their nearly three weeks of stay in Europe.

The national team will play six practice matches against Poland national team from Oct 19 to October 26 before heading to Austria to play another three matches from Oct 27 to 30, informed Bangladesh Hocket Federation's vice president Shafiullah Al Munir at a press briefing at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

Though Bangladesh will have to compete in comparatively warm weather at the AHF Cup in Hong Kong in November, the players will be preparing and playing practice matches in cold weather of Europe. The justification of such a preparation camp and hectic match schedules gave rise to a few questions at the press briefing.

"It was my promise to send the national

SQUAD

Zahid Hossain, Ashim Gope, Kamruzzaman Rana, Mohammad Milon, Rezaul Karim, Pushkor Khisha Mimo, Khorshedur Rahman, Ashraful Islam, Roman Sarkar, Arshad Hossain, Rasel Mahmud Jimmy, Shitul Ahmed, Mamunur Rahman Chayan, Imran Hasan Pintu, Krishna Kumar, Tapash Barman, Emon, Sarwar Hossain, Moinul Islam Koushik.

team to Europe for preparation. Besides, hockey is now a game based on technology and there are some technological loopholes in our team. So we want the players to adapt to these techniques and technology by the German coaching staff which we have appointed," Munir said, adding that they also want more Bangladeshi players to get an opportunity to play different leagues in Germany, which is another reason they are sending the team to Germany.

When asked whether nine matches in 12 days would help the national team, Munir said: "I have asked the players who are ready to play successive practice matches. I think if we play practice matches in the morning, then the training session will be held in afternoon session and most of the players are used to such schedules in Germany."

Having played the practice matches, the squad is supposed to return to Dhaka on November 6 and they will have a 10-day preparation camp before leaving for Hong Kong.



Real Madrid superstar Cristiano Ronaldo (R) gestures to teammate James Rodriguez during a training session at the Valdebebas Sport City in Madrid yesterday on the eve of their Champions League match against Legia Warsaw.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Prandelli gets winning start

REUTERS, Barcelona

Ex-Italy coach Cesare Prandelli got off to a winning start in La Liga as his new Valencia side triumphed 2-1 at Sporting Gijon on Sunday, while Villarreal maintained their impressive opening to the season by thrashing Celta Vigo 5-0.

Former Atletico Madrid and Watford midfielder Suarez provided the ideal launch pad for Prandelli with a thumping right-foot drive to score in the seventh minute.

Valencia were pegged back by Carlos Castro's header just before halftime but retook the lead in the 65th minute when Suarez calmly turned a knock-down into the net.

The win took Prandelli's team out of the relegation zone and up to 14th on nine points from eight games.

SWIMMING'S TALENT HUNT Second phase begins in Dhaka

SPORTS REPORTER

Having travelled through all 64 districts over the last 120 days, the talent hunt programme for new swimmers has returned to the capital as the second phase of 'Bangladesh, in search for the best swimmers' got underway at the Syed Nazrul Islam National Swimming Complex in Mirpur yesterday.

The Bangladesh Swimming Federation (BSF), in collaboration with Bangladesh Navy, launched this ambitious initiative on May 19 in Dhaka, and it travelled through the country over the last four months to select approximately 1300 potential swimming stars.

The selection committee, headed by Korean coach Park Tae Gun, will trim the number of swimmers to 160 and groom them through a three-month training camp. Out of them, 60 swimmers will be selected finally and those 60 will be divided into eight groups -- four groups each for boys and girls.

"A total of 160 swimmers will be selected over four days of the second phase and over 300 selected players will be taking part in each of the four days," BSF member Amirul Islam said yesterday. "160 swimmers will be chosen in trial, which includes medical and fitness test, conditioning training, checking previous records, new trail times, etc."

After providing three months' training, a competition will be held among the final 60 swimmers. Those 60 swimmers will be put through long-term training while eight group winner of the talent hunt programme will be awarded Tk 5 lakh each, informed Amirul.

Rudi relishes Spurs clash

AFP, Leverkusen



Bayer Leverkusen boss Rudi Voeller promises his erratic German team will put up 'a fight' in Tuesday's Champions League group stage match against high-flying Tottenham Hotspur.

After letting winning positions slip in their previous Group E fixtures, Leverkusen must be wary of Tottenham, the only team still unbeaten in England's top flight this season.

Roger Schmidt's Leverkusen face a Spurs side buoyed by Dele Alli's last-gasp equaliser in Saturday's 1-1 draw against West Bromwich Albion, which extended the North London club's unbeaten league run to eight matches.

Mauricio Pochettino's Tottenham are second in the Champions League group after their 1-0 win at CSKA Moscow three weeks ago, the same night Bayer drew 1-1 at table leaders Monaco.

"I'm really looking forward to it. We'll be playing in front of a full house against a very good team, who

have yet to lose a game in the Premier League," said Leverkusen's sports director Voeller.

"We tend to do well against teams like that, we will put in a good fight and the fans will see a great game, hopefully with a win for us."

Leverkusen have drawn both of their group stages games so far.

Having raced into a two-goal lead at home to CSKA Moscow, they allowed the Russians to come back to

FIXTURES

CSKA Moscow v Monaco, Bayer Leverkusen v Tottenham Hotspur, Sporting Lisbon v Borussia Dortmund, Real Madrid v Legia Warsaw, Leicester City v Copenhagen, Club Brugge v Porto, Dinamo Zagreb v Sevilla, Lyon v Juventus

force a 2-2 draw with all four goals scored in the first half.

Likewise, Javier 'Chicharito' Hernandez gave Leverkusen a second-half lead at Monaco a fortnight ago, only for Kamil Glik to hit a 94th-minute equaliser with the host's first shot of the game in a 1-1 draw.

Leverkusen's Bundesliga form of late has been erratic.

An impressive 2-0 win at home to

Borussia Dortmund and victory away to Mainz was sandwiched between defeats to strugglers Werder Bremen and mid-table Eintracht Frankfurt.

Pochettino says Spurs should have had more out of their draw with West Brom, which left them third in the Premier League, but says they will be ready for the game in Germany.

"We dominated the game, we created the better chances, but we have to be happy with the point and now get ready for Leverkusen on Tuesday," said Pochettino, whose team lost 2-1 at home to Monaco in their opening game.

One of Leverkusen's main tasks will be to contain Spurs' star-studded attack which includes England forward Dele Alli, Argentina's Erik Lamela and Son Heung-Min.

The South Korean international scored 29 goals in 87 appearances for Leverkusen between 2013 and 2015 before joining Spurs.

He was the Premier League's Player of the Month for September and having played only the last 20 minutes of Spurs' draw, the 24-year-old could be in line for a starting berth against his former club.

Mascherano signs new deal

AFP, Barcelona

Barcelona defender Javier Mascherano extended his contract with the Catalan giants until 2019 on Monday.

Mascherano, 32, has become a vital figure at the heart of the Barca back line since being converted into a centre-back by former Barca boss Pep Guardiola after arriving from Liverpool in 2010.

The Argentine international has won 16 trophies, including four La Liga titles and two Champions Leagues in 290 games in a Barca shirt.

Mascherano's buyout clause is set at 100 million euros (\$110 million).

Foxes need to rediscover winning habit

REUTERS, Leicester

Premier League champions Leicester City must pick themselves up to rediscover the winning habit and get their season back on track, winger Marc Albrighton has said.

Leicester have not been able to replicate last season's fairytale run under manager Claudio Ranieri, who led the 5,000-1 outsiders to the title against all the odds.

"They sit 13th in the standings after eight games.

"Last year, we had the rub of the green on many occasions which I feel we created ourselves. We were working hard all over the pitch and things started going for us," Albrighton told the club's website (www.lfc.com).

"If you're not doing the basics and you're not fighting as well as you can then things like that go against you. We've got to pick ourselves up and dust ourselves down... We're obviously disappointed but we need to get this out of our minds."

Ranieri's side have won two league games this season and have lost three of their last five. They have, however, won their opening two Champions League matches to top their group.

"We need to get back to what we're good at and that's fighting all over the pitch. We need to be harder to play against. As players, we need to stand up and be counted," Albrighton added.

"We've been too easy to beat and it's not good enough. We need to stand up and be men out there and that's got to be done all over the pitch."

Kyrgios to seek therapy

AFP, London



Wayward tennis star Nick Kyrgios will seek psychological help to avoid an eight week ban ordered by the ATP for a tantrum at the Shanghai Masters, Tennis Australia said Monday.

The ATP ordered a \$25,000 (22,700 euros) fine and said a three week ban would be increased to eight weeks if the 21-year-old Kyrgios did not seek help for his temper.

The world number 14 gave away points and swore and argued with fans before being booted off court after his 6-3, 6-1 defeat by Mischa Zverev in his second round match last week.

Tennis Australia said in a statement that it would support Kyrgios.

"Nick's health and wellbeing is a priority and the ATP has offered a reduced penalty on the provision that he seeks appropriate professional advice, which he has agreed to do," said a statement by the Australian body.

Kyrgios apologised again for his behaviour in Shanghai.

"The season has been a long one as I battled several injuries and other challenges towards the end of the summer," he said in a statement.

"My body finally just gave out in Shanghai both physically and mentally.

"This is no excuse, and I know very well that I need to apologise to the fans - in Shanghai and other parts of the world - as well as the tournament organisers in Shanghai who do an amazing job."

Kyrgios said he "regretted how his year was ending."

"I do understand and respect the



decision by the ATP and I will use this time off to improve on and off the court."

The \$25,000 ATP fine will be added to a \$16,500 penalty ordered last week.

The Shanghai outburst was the latest in a long line of incidents involving the Australian. Last year he was given a suspended one-month ban for making comments to Stan Wawrinka about his wife.

"Nick's conduct in Shanghai was unacceptable, disrespectful to the sport and its fans," said ATP executive chairman Chris Kermode.

"We take these matters very seriously and he has since apologised for his actions.

"Nick is a phenomenal talent and our hope is that he uses this time away from the tour constructively and, with some support, is able to return to competition with an improved mindset and stronger than ever before."

The ATP said that after an investiga-

tion into the Australian's second round match in Shanghai, Kyrgios had been found guilty of conduct contrary to the integrity of the game.

This meant an additional fine and an immediate eight week suspension.

"However, the suspension will be reduced to three tournament weeks upon agreement that the player enters a plan of care under the direction of a sports psychologist, or an equivalent plan approved by ATP."

If Kyrgios agrees to see a psychologist he could return to the tour on November 7, after the three week ban.

As he would have no more tournaments to play, even the three week ban means that Kyrgios's year is effectively over.

"We have spoken to his management and Nick has agreed to seek the help of a sports psychologist and will now be available to play in the Hopman Cup in early January," a Tennis Australia spokesperson told AFP.

Hazard credits change in system

REUTERS, London

Eden Hazard believes he has been given more freedom to score goals after being pushed to a central attacking role under Chelsea manager Antonio Conte.

The 25-year-old Belgian winger struck four goals in the Premier League last season but has already racked up three after the opening eight league games this campaign, with Conte opting for a wing-back formation in recent games.

"When you are strong defensively you bring confidence to all the team, and it is more easy to score goals," Hazard, who scored a goal in Saturday's 3-0 hammering of champions Leicester City, told Chelsea's website (www.chelseafc.com).

Hazard also scored back-to-back goals for his country in World Cup qualifying wins over Gibraltar and Bosnia earlier this month.

"I play more inside the pitch and we play also this system in the national team. For the strikers, we have more freedom, and even when we lose the ball if we press together we can get it back, and it is a good system for Chelsea," he added.

Neymar will be 'next Messi'

REUTERS, Barcelona



Brazilian Neymar is set to become the next best player in the world after Argentina's Lionel Messi, according to Barcelona midfielder Ivan Rakitic.

Since arriving at Nou Camp in June 2013, Neymar has netted 59 goals in around 100 La Liga appearances and has won two top flight titles as well as the Champions League.

He also came third in the FIFA Ballon d'Or awards behind team mate Messi and Real Madrid's Cristiano Ronaldo in January.

"If we speak about the best, it is Leo Messi. Neymar is on the way to be the next best," Rakitic told the Times.

"Barca will do the best thing to sign a new contract with him and maybe they can put a buyout clause as high as possible, because he will be the next Messi for sure."

"He's scored (nearly) 300 goals and he's only 24. He's really special."

Croatia international Rakitic, who joined Barca in June 2014, believes striker Luis Suarez's spell at Liverpool made him the most feared striker in the world.

Suarez was top scorer in the Premier League and claimed the Professional Footballers' Association and Football Writers' Player of the Year awards at Liverpool in the 2013-14 season, inspiring the club to second-place top flight finish.

"The years at Liverpool were really important for Luis. There he takes the change from a good player to be the best striker in the world and then do the next step at Barcelona, Rakitic added.

"When he's not playing, it feels something's wrong. Luis is one of the most important players for us. He's a really good guy in the dressing room, one of the most open people who likes to joke."

