

## Tigers begin SL camp today

SPORTS REPORTER



The formal training camp for the tour of Sri Lanka will begin today at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur. However, most of the Tigers returned to business from their breaks after playing the one-off Test match against India in Hyderabad much before the formal start of the three-day camp.

Many played the fourth-round matches of the Bangladesh Cricket League (BCL), while others started training and gym practice individually.

The foreign coaching staff, except bowling coach Courtney Walsh, were expected to return last night.

"Everyone is expected to return today and hopefully everybody will be present on the first day of the camp. The camp will start with the fitness session under Mario [national team fitness trainer Mario Villavarayan] which will be followed by skill practice. The head coach [Chandika Hathurusingha] will definitely join the camp tomorrow but Walsh's arrival may be delayed," informed national team manager Khaled Mahmud.

The selectors have already announced a 16-member squad for the two-match Test series but Shakib Al Hasan, Tamim Iqbal and Mahmudullah Riyad will not join the camp as they will join the team in Sri Lanka from Dubai after their stints in the Pakistan Super League.

The Bangladesh team will fly to Colombo on February 27. The tour will start with a two-day warm-up match and the first Test will commence from March 7 at Galle. The second Test, Bangladesh's 100th, will start from March 15 at P Sara International Stadium and during the match selectors will announce the squad for the three-match ODI series.



Bangladesh Test skipper Mushfiqur Rahim (L) ramps up his fitness regime yesterday at the Mirpur gym for the tour of Sri Lanka which will start with the Test leg on March 7 while ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza (R), who will take charge from the first ODI on March 25, stays in the background.

PHOTO: STAR

## Can Ctg Abahani, MSC survive?

SPORTS REPORTER from Chittagong

Even before stepping onto the field for their third and final match, Bangladesh Premier League champions Abahani had been eliminated from the group stage of the Sheikh Kamal International Club Cup for the second successive time, leaving local hopes resting on holders Chittagong Abahani and Mohammedan SC.

Although Chittagong Abahani are in a comparatively better position in Group B with four points from two outings, the group is still wide open as two teams -- Shaheen Asmayee FC and Manang Marshyangdi Club -- have three points each while Mohammedan are at the bottom with one point.

If more than two teams finish with equal points, then group champions and runners-up will be decided on the basis of head-to-head results, goals scored and goals conceded, before tallying the goal difference.

If hosts Chittagong Abahani, who need just a draw to ensure a semifinal berth, and Mohammedan can post outright victories against Manang Marshyangdi Club and Shaheen Asmayee respectively, then both local outfits will advance to the semifinals as they did in the inaugural edition.

However, defeats at the hands of their respective rivals will cause the reverse, with both teams exiting the tournament like Abahani and leaving the last-four battle as a foreign affair.

## Starc revives Aus after Yadav burst

AFP, Pune



Australia's Matt Renshaw admitted he feared he had let his teammates down by leaving the fray with an upset stomach before returning to hit a gritty half-century in the first Test against India Thursday.

In the opening day of a four-match

series between the world's top two sides, Renshaw's innings and some late Mitchell Starc fireworks pulled Australia back from the brink as they reached 256 for nine at stumps.

Starc has so far made 57 off 58 balls and Josh Hazlewood was with him at the crease on one at Pune's Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium.

Indian seamer Umesh Yadav claimed four wickets while the spinners

Ravichandran Ashwin and Ravindra Jadeja took two each.

The left-handed Renshaw was the anchor of the innings, top-scoring with 68, although it was Starc who provided the entertainment and caused a rethink in assessments of who had the better of the day.

All had seemed calm with Renshaw for most of the morning session but when David Warner fell with the scores on 82, the English-born batsman caused a stir by following his opening partner back to the pavilion.

But after Australian skipper Steve Smith fell for 27 just before the tea break, Renshaw then strode back to the crease to register his second Test fifty in his fifth game.

Renshaw said he had been feeling unwell for most of the morning and had tried to tough it out before deciding he had to leg it off the pitch.

"It was tough. I wasn't too sure on the ruling, I didn't know you could retire ill so I thought I just had to get out there and make sure I batted till lunch," he told reporters.

"It wasn't an ideal situation and coming back it was probably a bit strange for me, waiting to bat because as an opener you just go straight out there and bat."

Renshaw admitted his captain Smith "wasn't too thrilled" about his retirement just before the break.

Renshaw struck 10 fours and a six during his 156-ball stay which ended when he edged a ball from Ashwin and was caught by Murali Vijay in the slips.

His dismissal was swiftly followed by the departure of Steve O'Keefe and Nathan Lyon who both fell for ducks off consecutive Umesh deliveries.

Warner, who had tackled the Indian spinners with good feet movement, was the first of Umesh's four victims, falling to a good length delivery that hit the bat en route to stumps just before the lunch break.

"There was some movement, there was a bit of reverse swing as well. I tried to keep the ball on the up," Umesh said of Warner's wicket.

"It is a turning wicket and reverse swing is always helpful on such pitches."

Lyon's dismissal meant the visitors -- who have a dreadful recent record on the sub-continent -- had slumped from 119-1 to 205 for nine before Starc put on an unbeaten 51-run stand with Hazlewood.

Starc, better known for his fast-bowling, caught the Indian attack by surprise by carting them around the ground in a blistering innings which featured five boundaries and three sixes. It was the ninth Test fifty.

The match is the first in a four-Test series between the world's two top-ranked sides.

SCORES IN BRIEF

AUSTRALIA: First innings 256 for 9 (Warner 38, Renshaw 68, Smith 27, Handscomb 22, Starc 57 not out; Ashwin 2-59, Jadeja 2-74, Yadav 4-32)

INDIA: Vijay, Rahul, Pujara, Kohli (capt), Rahane, Saha, Ashwin, Jadeja, J Yadav, Sharma, U Yadav.



India seamer Umesh Yadav (L) bowled with venom on a spinners' pitch to take four Australian wickets on the first day of the first Test at the Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium in Pune yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## Bangladesh football is stuck: Chhiring

SPORTS REPORTER From Chittagong



In the span of only 11 months Nepal were crowned champions in three successive international tournaments -- the Bangabandhu Gold Cup in Bangladesh, the football event in the South Asian (SA) Games and the AFC Solidarity Cup in Malaysia. That success from January to November 2016 reflects the strides that the Himalayan nation have made in football.

Such distinguished achievements at the international level within such a short period of time were only possible because of the presence of some talented footballers who have been groomed at academies of the All Nepal Football Federation (ANFA), which is very different to the system of preparing players in Bangladesh.

"Most players of the national team are from the ANFA academy. Nepalese footballers are getting good facilities and training and the management is also playing a good role in their development. The players of this generation are as talented as the previous generation, but they have been using new technology under the guidance of foreign coaches which is making the difference at international level," opined Chhiring Lopsang Gurung, coach of Nepalese side Manang Marshyangdi Club who are taking part in the ongoing Sheikh Kamal International

Tournament in Chittagong.

Nepal were once considered lightweights when compared to Bangladesh, but they have now become a big hurdle for Bangladesh, whose struggles at international level were underlined by a defeat to Bhutan in the Asian Cup Qualifiers which knocked them out of the tournament.

Bangladesh's last success in the international circuit came in 2010 when they won the



football event of the SA Games. Since then, they have had a barren run and suffered losses to subcontinent opponents such as Maldives, Nepal, Bhutan and India.

"If you want success, you must plan for the future and have everything in place from the beginning to the end. That's what Nepal have and that's why they are shining at the international level," said the 51-year-old coach.

"Some of the footballers are also getting a chance to play in leagues in India, Maldives and Indonesia and gathering valuable experience, while footballers like Bimal Gharti and Anjan Bista have been going for trials in European clubs which I think is a positive sign for Nepal football."

The hard work has been paying dividends for Nepal. Despite being eliminated from the play-off stage of the Asian Cup Qualifiers, they returned for a place in the qualifiers proper as champions of the AFC Solidarity Cup after Guam withdrew from the qualifiers. Meanwhile Bangladesh, despite agreeing to participate, withdrew from the Solidarity Cup and incurred a huge fine.

"Football is changing everywhere. Nepal were down before but they have been improving. I don't know why Bangladesh are going down despite Bangladeshi players getting more facilities than Nepalese footballers. I think Bangladesh football is stuck at one level while other countries are improving fast," opined Chhiring, who first came to Bangladesh in 1987 to play an Asian Club Championship match for Manang Marshyangdi Club against Mohammedan SC, which the hosts won 6-2.

However, Chhiring believes that although Nepal have won three successive international trophies, those achievements are little to write home about until Nepal win the SAFF Football Championship.



## Ekramul passes away

SPORTS REPORTER

Ekramul Bashar, a renowned goalkeeper in his playing days who represented Dhaka Mohammedan Sporting Club, died at the Bangladesh Medical College Hospital yesterday. He was 53.

Ekramul had been battling stomach cancer for over one year. A fine athlete Ekramul also played for Bangladesh Police, East End Club, Farashganj, Arambagh and Dhanmondi Club in top level football. He was also the elder brother of former Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar.

The Bangladesh Football Federation and the Bangladesh Cricket Board condoled the passing away of Ekramul and extended sincere sympathies to his family members.

## Abahani bow out Pocheon, TC Sports reach semis

ANISUR RAHMAN from Chittagong



Although they failed to qualify for the next phase, Bangladesh Premier League champions Abahani ended their Sheikh Kamal International Club Cup campaign on a winning note as they handed a 2-1 defeat to Kyrgyzstan's FC Alga at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong yesterday.

The match between Abahani and FC Alga was no more than an academic affair after Pocheon Citizen FC finished second in Group B by playing out a 1-1 draw with eventual group champions TC Sports Club.

While Abahani exited the tournament with a wooden spoon for the second successive time, the Sky Blues at least had the satisfaction of defeating a Central Asian outfit for the first time.

From the outset, Abahani exerted tremendous pressure and exposed FC Alga's backline, which survived two close calls as winger Jewel Rana drove his shots miles off target from inside the box, before defender Wali Faisal gave Abahani a well-deserved lead in the 27th minute, heading in from a corner.

Four minutes from the break, Abahani doubled their lead through English midfielder David Jonathan, who beat Alga goalkeeper Ruslan Dzhanibekov with a 25-yard free kick.

After resumption Alga gained a foothold in the match and created some good chances, but Abahani goalkeeper Shahidul Alam Sohel kept them at bay with some fine saves before defender Yeasin Khan conceded a penalty for handling the ball in the 76th minute. Tursunboi Husanov stepped up to the spot, reduced the margin and set the stage for a tense but ultimately anticlimactic finish.

In the first match of the day at the same venue, a second successive draw saw Pocheon come back from a goal behind to finish as runners-up in Group A with five points, ending Abahani's slim chances of moving into the semifinals.

From the outset, South Korean side Pocheon controlled the game with their crisp passing football. They came close to breaking the deadlock twice in the opening stages of the game, but they spurned the opportunities. TC Sports then took the lead against the run of play in added time of the first half when Stewart Cornelius Ezekiel latched onto a through-ball and darted into the box before placing an angled shot into the far post.

With their fate hanging in the balance, Pocheon pressed for the equaliser after resumption to stay alive in the tournament and finally struck in the 76th minute, but not before surviving a scare.

Ibrahim Mabudhee Hussain squandered an opportunity to put the game to bed in the 69th minute, failing to beat the goalkeeper in a one-on-one situation before Park Jung Soo levelled the game after substitute Ko Ji Man hit the post from the spot.



Abahani's English midfielder David Jonathan (C) celebrates scoring his side's second goal from a free kick against FC Alga during their Sheikh Kamal International Club Cup encounter at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong yesterday.

PHOTO: ANURUP KANTI DAS