

Flood defers hockey polls

SPORTS REPORTER

The much-hyped election of the Bangladesh Hockey Federation (BHF) has been postponed for indefinite period by the National Sports Council (NSC) yesterday due to worsening flood situation across the country.

"As flood across the country has turned into a crisis situation and most areas have been affected by flood, the communication system of most areas has collapsed. The voters and candidates of the Bangladesh Hockey Federation are facing uncertainty over participation in the polls, so they have communicated with the election commission and BHF to defer the elections. Considering the situation, we have postponed August 27 polls until the announcement of rescheduling works," election commissioner Muhammad Shukur Ali read out a statement at the NSC conference room.

Shukur Ali later said that the District and Divisional Sports Organisers' council, also known as Forum, appealed to defer the polls.

Interestingly the announcement of postponement came just a couple of hours after the leaders of Forum met with the BCB president Nazmul Hassan Papon and BHF general secretary aspirant Khaza Rahmatullah at a city hotel where a number of councilors from Dhaka clubs, districts and divisions supported Rahmatullah.

"We are trying to form a consensus panel. We need both clubs and districts because it is not possible to run hockey with only either clubs or districts. Today we learnt the sentiment of the representatives of districts and we will sit with the clubs soon," said Papon, who played a pivotal role in ending hockey impasse in 2015 by reshuffling the then committee.

However, another general secretary candidate Abdur Rahid Shikdar claimed that the election commission has taken the decision without consulting with them.

"If flood is the only reason behind the polls postponement, I have no objection. But if flood is used as an excuse, then I condemn the move as some 41 councilors already gave me their consent for the polls," reacted Rashid.



Liverpool's teenage midfielder Trent Alexander-Arnold (L) jumps for joy after scoring the opening goal against Hoffenheim during their Champions League play-off first leg encounter in Sinshgen on Tuesday.

'I'll give you the Ballon d'Or'

Messi's desperate plea to Neymar

STAR SPORT DESK

In a desperate attempt to stop Neymar from making the switch to Paris Saint-Germain, Lionel Messi reportedly promised that he would make the Brazilian a Ballon d'Or winner if he stayed back at the Camp Nou.

Messi, Neymar and Luis Suarez met at the Sheraton Parsippany Hotel in New Jersey on July 21, just ahead of their friendly against Juventus, to change Neymar's mind.

Not knowing that he had already agreed personal terms with PSG and was simply waiting for the record-breaking 222 million euros to be deposited, Messi reportedly told Neymar: "What do you want? You want to be the Ballon d'Or [winner]? I'll make you Ballon d'Or [winner]!"

One of the driving forces behind Neymar's move to Paris was that the Brazilian wanted – aside from doubling his paycheck – to be the 'main man' on his team, something that he did not foresee in the near future at Barcelona, where he always remained under Messi's shadow.

The following day was a match against

Juventus, where Messi backed up his words and let Neymar have the reigns to the match. He stuck by the Brazilian in the warm-up and even allowed him to take the first free-kick of the match – which Neymar shot against the wall.

However, Neymar – constantly sought by Messi throughout the match – emerged as the star, scoring both goals in a 2-1 win.

However, there is speculation that Messi's remark may have hampered his relationship with Neymar as the

Brazilian took it as more of a slight than generosity. He felt that he could win the Ballon d'Or on his own, not with Messi handing football's greatest individual prize to him on a platter.

Now Neymar is a PSG player and he will get full credit for any success that the team has. He will also face the brunt of any backlash if things go sideways. But the Brazilian remains steadfast in his desire – not only to lead his own team, but to win the Ballon d'Or while doing so.



Ronaldo ban appeal rejected

AGENCIES, Madrid

Real Madrid have failed in their appeal against the five-match suspension handed to Cristiano Ronaldo for his red card during Sunday's Spanish Super Cup final's first leg against Barcelona.

Ronaldo saw red in after picking up two yellow cards, the second of which came after he was harshly adjudged to have died. He was subsequently banned for one match for the sending-off, but saw four games added to the punishment for reacting to his dismissal by pushing referee Ricardo de Burgos Bengoetxea in the back.

The Spanish Football Federation's appeals committee was met on Wednesday to run the rule over Real's challenge of the ban, with its verdict yet to be officially announced, but numerous outlets reported the decision.

Press hail Alexander

APP, London

Trent Alexander-Arnold's stunning free-kick for Liverpool in their 2-1 Champions League win over Hoffenheim had the British media purring "Who needs Coutinho?" in reference to the wantaway Brazilian star.

The 18-year-old's opening goal for Liverpool in the tie in Germany – setting them up nicely for next week's home leg – incited the Daily Mail to headline their report "Alexander The Great".

Alexander-Arnold called it a "thing of dreams" to score on his European debut for his "boyhood club" in their Champions League play-off, first-leg clash, and was lavishly praised by club icon Steven Gerrard.

But had Barcelona target Philippe Coutinho been fit, Alexander-Arnold probably wouldn't even have taken the free-kick.

Gerrard, who coaches the Liverpool Under-18 side, said the former club mascot – another Liverpool great Jamie Carragher tweeted a photo of him and Alexander-Arnold in the tunnel before a League Cup match in 2009 – could threaten England international Nathan Clyne's first choice spot at fullback this season.

"It was a fabulous free-kick and it's ironic really because Coutinho might have taken it if he was available," said Gerrard.

He has played superbly in general play but to have the character to take that before the likes of (Jordan) Henderson and (Sadio) Mane says a lot.

"I know this kid very well, he's going to be a top, top player and Nathaniel Clyne has to be very, very careful this season because he is already breathing down his neck."

Liverpool coach Jurgen Klopp lavished praise on the teenager, whose deftly-struck free-kick wrong-footed the Hoffenheim defence to give Liverpool the lead on 35 minutes.

"I find it astounding that an 18-year-old has the balls to cheekily smash in a free-kick from a situation like that," enthused Klopp.

"It was a very intense game for him, he is a great young player with a lot of potential."

Former Republic of Ireland striker great Tony Casciaro, now a respected pundit for The Times, also praised the youngster for his boldness in stepping up to take the freekick, which reflected "the respect that his teammates have for him".

Casciaro added that defensively it was hard to judge him – though his "electric pace" is eye-catching – and whilst he was at fault for the late Hoffenheim goal, he would learn from it.

"Overall he's very athletic, though he needs to fill out a little, but that will come," wrote Casciaro.

"In terms of defending it's pretty hard to judge him in this Liverpool team because the full backs are often so exposed.

"The late Hoffenheim goal was the only time he put a foot wrong... but that's why he plays these big games, to learn and get the mistakes out of his system."



QUICK SINGLES

The following are a few samples of stories that did not make the print edition. However, if they pique your interest, you can always read them online on The Daily Star website by simply scanning the QR codes listed below:

England's All ready for life in the pink
 Moen Ali is confident it will take more than a pink ball to put him off his stride during England's inaugural day/night Test.

Tamim gets his stitches removed
 Bangladesh cricketer Tamim Iqbal, who suffered an injury to his stomach during Bangladesh's practice match at Chittagong had his stitches removed today.

Van Dijk not for sale, says Saints
 Southampton defender Virgil van Dijk won't be allowed to leave St Mary's in the current transfer window, the Premier League club's chairman Ralph Krueger said on Wednesday.

Sanchez talks stall

APP, London

Alexis Sanchez and Arsenal remain at an impasse over new contract talks, manager Arsene Wenger said on Wednesday.

Wenger's admission will only heighten speculation the 28-year-old Chile international forward will join Premier League rivals Manchester City.

Sanchez, who played under City manager Pep Guardiola at Barcelona, is presently injured with an abdominal strain which will keep him out of Saturday's game against Stoke City and prevented him from playing in the opening 4-3 win over Leicester City.

"He (Sanchez) is a player who goes into the final year of his contract. We have not progressed on that," said Wenger on Wednesday.

"Let's not be wrong, it's not an ideal situation on the financial side and it demands some sacrifice.

"But first of all it doesn't mean the players who are in the final year of their contract will not extend their contract. You have still that possibility and we work on that as well."

If no contract extension is agreed and Sanchez stays at the Emirates, he could leave for free at the end of the season.

"That is a consequence of what I say, yes, unfortunately," added Wenger.

"But we have to make a choice between efficiency on the field and financial interest, and most of the time if you can find a good compromise, it's better."

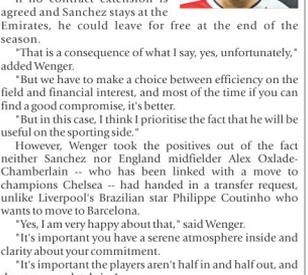
"But in this case, I think I prioritise the fact that he will be useful on the sporting side."

However, Wenger took the positives out of the fact neither Sanchez nor England midfielder Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain – who has been linked with a move to champions Chelsea – had handed in a transfer request, unlike Liverpool's Brazilian star Philippe Coutinho who wants to move to Barcelona.

"Yes, I am very happy about that," said Wenger.

"It's important you have a serene atmosphere inside and clarity about your commitment."

"It's important the players aren't half in and half out, and they are completely in."



Matuidi set for Juventus

APP, Milan

Midfielder Blaise Matuidi is on the verge of signing for Juventus, who have agreed to pay PSG 20 million euros plus bonuses, according to reports on Wednesday.

Matuidi, who won four consecutive league titles with PSG, is expected undergo a medical and sign a deal that would see him earn 3.5m euros per season, according to Gazzetta dello Sport.

The box-to-box midfielder, known for his strength on the ball and ability to win back possession, has been a Juventus target for some time.

Boateng quits Las Palmas

APP, Madrid

Kevin-Prince Boateng had his contract with La Liga side Las Palmas terminated by mutual agreement on Wednesday with the club citing "irreversible personal reasons" as the cause for his departure.

"Las Palmas and Boateng have reached an agreement to rescind the contract," Las Palmas said in a statement. "Irreversible personal reasons provoked his unexpected departure."

Boateng scored 10 goals in 28 games in an impressive solo season in Spain and is reportedly set to return to Germany to join Eintracht Frankfurt.

Gylfi moves to Everton

REUTERS, London

Everton manager Ronald Koeman said he expects Gylfi Sigurdsson to boost the club's goal-scoring options after the attacking midfielder completed his medical before he transfers from Swansea City.

Sigurdsson will move to Goodison Park after the two clubs agreed a fee of about 45 million pounds, a record for Everton, according to the British media.

The 27-year-old played a key part in Swansea's avoiding relegation last season, scoring nine goals and 13 assists.

"The latest is that he had his medical this morning. What I heard from the doctor was no problem," Koeman told a news conference before the Europa League first-leg playoff against Croatian side Hajduk Split on Thursday.

"We worked a long time to get this deal in and he was one of the key players to bring in. We knew would lose Lukaku for this season and we need players who bring productivity to the team."

Romelu Lukaku moved to Manchester United last month, for a reported transfer fee of 75 million pounds.

Sigurdsson "is the type of player with a lot of productivity, Koeman said. "In my opinion, he is one of the best in the Premier League."

The manager also confirmed he is still waiting to find out the extent of a hamstring injury midfielder Ross Barkley suffered in training last week.



Spanish forward Jese joined Stoke City on a season-long loan from PSG on Wednesday, with The Potters now becoming the club with the most Champions League winners in the Premier League. They will now have five players – Jese, Darren Fletcher, Bojan Krkic, Ibrahim Afellay and Sherdan Shaqiri – who have won Europe's greatest prize.



This Man Utd team is like the Invincibles'

AGENCIES, London

Former Arsenal legend Thierry Henry has compared his fabled 2003-04 Premier League winning side to the new looking Manchester United.

"The Invincibles cruised to the 2004 Premier League title, finishing the season unbeaten in league play.

"Do I see The Invincibles in this Man Utd team? Oh yeah," Henry told Sky Sports. "When I see them especially on Sunday I saw that. I saw power, pace, guys with ideas and legs."

"They can cover that the ground really quickly, that's very important. We had that at Arsenal," Henry added.

While United's prospects of going unbeaten over the rest of the campaign remain slim, Jose Mourinho has laid the foundation for what could be a promising season by signing players like Romelu Lukaku and Nemanja Matic to reinforce his team.

"Mourinho likes bringing players he knows are going to be able to play the way he likes to play," Henry added.