



Bangladesh national hockey team players jog during a warm-up session on the first day of camp for July's Indoor Asia Cup at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Indoor hockey camp starts

SPORTS REPORTER

34 out of the 37 players called up took part in the first day of training for the upcoming Indoor Hockey Asia Cup, at the Maulana Bhasani National Stadium in Dhaka yesterday.

The training on the first day was confined to within warm-ups and fitness drills and it will likely remain so for the next three days before a 12-day break for the Eid vacation.

As indoor hockey is hard to be simulated on astroturf, the training camp will shift to BKSP indoor facilities on June 9 while the team will have two weeks of training in Thailand ahead of the tournament, which will be held from July 15 to July 21, informed Bangladesh Hockey Federation's (BHF) senior vice-president Abdur Rashid Shikder.

"We visited BKSP indoor facilities today. I won't say I'm totally satisfied with the facilities, but I hope we it

will be workable when we move the camp there on June 9," Shikder told reporters yesterday.

Indoor hockey is a new concept to Bangladeshi hockey players. Although the indoor version of this sport has held World Cups and Asian Cups, many of the established teams do not participate in this miniature version of the game.

Bangladesh will be making their first appearance at the Indoor Asia Cup where they will be pitted against seven-time champions Iran along with Malaysia, Thailand and Philippines in Pool A. Pool B will feature Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Chinese Taipei, Singapore, Myanmar and Nepal.

Since Bangladesh have no prior experience in indoor hockey, they will need time to acclimatise with the format, which is held on a different surface and played with different balls and sticks under rules different

from field hockey.

"The team will go to Thailand in the beginning of July to get more accustomed to the format before the tournament," Shikder said.

The BHF's senior vice-president also informed that they have already appointed a Polish coach, who will be available to come to Bangladesh after May 28.

In the meanwhile, two local coaches will conduct training sessions. One of them, former national team player Ashikuzzaman, said that having experience in this format would help players in field hockey too.

"A lot of things are different in indoor hockey from field hockey. But if someone plays indoor hockey, he can improve individual skills a lot which would help his in field hockey. The idea of indoor hockey is to improve the technical aspects of players," Ashikuzzaman said.

Messi wants Valverde to stay

AFP, Madrid

Lionel Messi wants Ernesto Valverde to continue as Barcelona coach but admits the team have not recovered from their Champions League loss to Liverpool as they face Valencia in the Copa del Rey final on Saturday.

After winning La Liga by 11 points, Barca can complete a domestic double by beating Valencia in Seville, but even that will not erase the disappointment of throwing away a three-goal lead at Anfield.

Valverde conceded his future was uncertain after the loss but the club's president, Josep Maria Bartomeu, has since said the coach

will remain in charge.

"I honestly believe the boss has done an impressive job during his time in charge," Messi said at a press conference on Friday.

"I think that in the defeat to Liverpool, he is practically blameless, we are the only ones to blame for that match.

"That can happen one year. but two years in a row is unforgivable. The boss will obviously be partly to blame but it is the players even more.

"I would like him to continue. Last year, we did the double and even though it was stained by getting knocked out of the Champions League, this year we can win the double again.

"If you look at his two years,

there have been two bad games, but beyond those the rest has been good."

Valverde was also asked again about his future.

"I have no complaints from the president or the board," said Valverde, who added: "You seem very worried, don't worry so much."

Barcelona were desperate to win the Champions League, after failing to reach the final in four consecutive years while also watching Real Madrid lift the trophy three times in a row.

Since losing to Liverpool, Valverde's team have beaten Getafe 2-0 at Camp Nou before ending the league season with a 2-2 draw away at Eibar on Sunday.

"We are still recovering from the

Neymar to arrive early for Copa

AFP, Teresopolis

Star striker Neymar will join Brazil's Copa America squad for training Saturday, three days ahead of schedule, an official said Friday.

"He will arrive tomorrow between 11:00 am and noon," (1400 GMT and 1500 GMT) Brazil football federation press officer Vinicius Rodrigues told reporters at the Granja Comary complex in Teresopolis near Rio de Janeiro.

Neymar, the world's most expensive player, had been expected to arrive on May 28, six days after Brazil began preparations for the tournament. No explanation was provided for the change.

Reporters were tipped off to Neymar's early arrival after he failed to show up to a PSG training session open to the media.

His teammates Marquinhos and Thiago Silva, who are also part of the Brazilian squad, were there.

Neymar had been sidelined for PSG's last two games of the domestic season and the French Champions Trophy after being handed a three-match suspension for lashing out at a spectator following PSG's shock defeat by Rennes in the French Cup final earlier this month.

FRENCH OPEN STARTS TODAY

Nadal in way of another Djoko Slam

AFP, Paris

Novak Djokovic can become only the second man in history to have twice held all four Grand Slam titles at the same time with victory at the French Open.

However, a returning Roger Federer and rejuvenated Rafael Nadal will once again stand in his way.

World number one Djokovic completed his first private stranglehold of all four Slams with victory at Roland Garros in 2016.

Having clinched the 2018 Wimbledon and US Open titles and then a seventh Australian Open crown in January this year, the Serb is tantalisingly close to another 'Djoko Slam'.

Federer and Nadal, with 20 and 17 career Grand Slam titles each respectively, may be



ROGER FEDERER



RAFAEL NADAL



NOVAK DJOKOVIC

ahead of 15-time major winner Djokovic in total hauls.

However, they have never managed to hold all four of the sport's greatest prizes at the same time.

It is such a rare feat that only Don Budge (1938) and Rod Laver (1962 and 1969) -- all calendar Grand Slams -- have pulled off the sweep in the sport's history.

Djokovic, who turned 32 on Wednesday, is playing down his potential date with destiny.

After losing to Nadal in the Italian Open final last weekend, the Serb was in no doubt that it was the Spaniard who would likely be celebrating a 12th Roland Garros title in a little over two weeks' time.

"Nadal, number one favourite, without a doubt -- then everyone else," he said.

However, he admits his Paris triumph of 2016 which gave him his first sweep, is fuelling his bid for more history.

"There is an extra motivation and incentive to win Roland Garros because of the opportunity to hold all four Slams, something I did three years ago, and that gives me obviously enough reason to believe I can do it again."

Twelve months ago, such confidence would have appeared reckless when he was shocked by Italian journeyman Marco Cecchinato in the quarter-finals, a defeat

sure if it's in my racquet," he said Friday.

The Swiss star faces Italy's Lorenzo Sonego, ranked at 73 in the first round on Sunday and could meet Nadal in the semi-finals.

Nadal, whose record at Roland Garros stands at a staggering 11 titles and a win-loss record of 86-2, claimed a ninth Italian Open title and a record 34th Masters last week.

"I don't care if I'm the favourite," said Nadal who starts against German qualifier Yannick Hanfmann, the world 184 who has never won a Grand Slam match.

"I care about feeling well and playing well."

Nadal's three-set win over Djokovic in Rome was timely as it was his first title of 2019 and had followed three successive semi-final losses at Monte Carlo, Barcelona and Madrid.

The last two of those were against Dominic Thiem and Stefanos Tsitsipas, both of whom play with a one-handed backhand, just like Federer.

Thiem, the 2018 runner-up to Nadal at Roland Garros, has defeated the Spaniard four times on clay.

"There is a new wave coming through with the one-handed backhand that can counter some of Rafa's spins and lefty play," said Federer.

SHORT CORNER



An official music video titled 'Khelbe Tiger, jitbe Tiger' by the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) and Lifebuoy was released ahead of the World Cup in England during a press conference in Mirpur yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Tuchel extends PSG deal

Paris Saint-Germain coach Thomas Tuchel has extended his deal with the French Ligue 1 champions through to June 2021, the club announced on Saturday.

The 45-year-old German took over in June 2018 and despite winning Ligue 1 has come under scrutiny after the Parisian club's defeat to Manchester United in the Champions League last 16.

The news cuts short speculation that PSG's Qatari owners would fire Tuchel and hire outgoing Juventus coach Massimiliano Allegri.

"I'm delighted to extend my contract and commitment to Paris Saint-Germain," Tuchel said.

"I'd like to thank the chairman and the whole club for their trust in me and my staff. This only reinforces my ambition to bring this team to the very top through hard work," he told the club website.

--AFP

Spanish police detain 23 before Copa del Rey final

Spanish police have detained 23 people in "incidents" in the southern city of Sevilla ahead of the Copa del Rey final that pits Barcelona against Valencia, they said on Saturday.

"Last night in Sevilla, police detained 23 people (who now won't be able to go to the Copa del Rey final) and seized blunt objects during incidents in the Nervion area," police tweeted.

Nervion houses the Sevilla FC stadium.

They added five police officers were slightly hurt.

A police spokesman could give no further details.

Local media, however, reported that those detained were members of the Boixos Nois, a group of ultra supporters of FC Barcelona.

Online sports site ElDesmarque reported they had been looking for a fight with ultra supporters of Sevilla.

--AFP

Dijon escape automatic relegation

Dijon came from behind on the last day of Ligue 1 on Friday to beat Toulouse, 2-1, and grab a lifeline that could keep them in the French top flight.

At the start of the final round, Guingamp were sure to finish last, while Dijon occupied the other direct relegation spot, one point behind Caen occupying the pace that brings a playoff against a Ligue 2 team.

Dijon needed to win but fell behind at home to a 33rd minute goal by Bafode Diakite. Naim Sliti levelled after 58 minutes. Four minutes later, Julio Tavares smashed in a close range shot that Mauro Goicoechea reached but could not stop only for the assistant referee to flag off side. Referee Mikael Lesage consulted video replay and awarded the goal.

--AFP

Ceferin defends Baku final

UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin has defended the decision to host the Europa League final in Baku in an interview with German news magazine Der Spiegel set to be published on Saturday.

Chelsea and Arsenal are set to play in Baku on May 29, and UEFA has faced heavy criticism, both for the distance of the venue from London and over Azerbaijan's record on human rights.

Ceferin, 51, told Der Spiegel that the final would be played in Baku because "there are people who live there who love football".

"The human rights situation is a problem, but it is also a problem in other European states. Does that mean the fans in Baku do not deserve live football?"

--AFP

Davies follows Kompany to Anderlecht

REUTERS, Brussels

Manchester City academy chief Simon Davies has followed Vincent Kompany to Anderlecht to become the Belgian club's head coach.

Anderlecht made the announcement on Saturday, saying that the 45-year-old Welshman had signed a contract until 2022 to join "TeamKompany".

Kompany has become Anderlecht's player-manager after helping Manchester City to become the first team to win the English domestic treble.

Former Manchester United and Chester City midfielder Davies has worked for Manchester City for nine years, succeeding Patrick Vieira as head of the club's elite development squad, including the under-23 side.

He has also been head of academy coaching from under-13s to under-23s.

"When Vinny asked me to make the move with him to RSC Anderlecht, I didn't hesitate," Davies said in a statement released by the Belgian club.

"We are starting a beautiful project: taking RSC Anderlecht back to the place where they belong, with special emphasis on the development of talented young players."



Rusty but pain-free Rabada ready to roll

REUTERS, Cardiff

South Africa speedster Kagiso Rabada conceded feeling rusty in their warm-up match against Sri Lanka but was relieved that he did not feel any pain on his return to action from a back injury.

A key cog in South Africa's bid for a maiden World Cup title, Rabada returned home from the Indian Premier League (IPL) earlier this month to avoid aggravating a back problem ahead of the showpiece tournament.

The right-arm paceman returned figures of 7-0-40-1 in their 87-run



victory against 1996 champions Sri Lanka on Friday and was not unhappy with the outing.

"I felt a bit rusty, but it was good to get a run out in the middle and get a feel for things again," he said.

"There's no pain. I'm feeling all right, just rusty in terms of my bowling smoothness. But it's all a work in progress.

"That's why we have warm-up games so it'll be a challenge for me to get ready before the tournament starts."

Skipper Faf du Plessis hoped Rabada would get better as the tournament progressed.

"KG has been slowly building up, working on his action and working on his run-up. Today was the first time he was bowling at full intensity," du Plessis said.

Rabada headlines what is one of the best pace attacks in the tournament who will begin their campaign on Thursday against an England side teeming with explosive strokeplayers.

"England is going to be a stiff challenge, but an enjoyable one," said Rabada, who turned 24 on Saturday.

"It's crunch time - the first game of the World Cup and it's going to go down in history.

"They're a strong team, with good batsmen and bowlers. Multiple players from our team have played against England, we're familiar with them and that helps."

Border picks Kohli, Morgan and Finch

PTI, Melbourne

Cricket legend Allan Border has handpicked Virat Kohli, Eoin Morgan and Aaron Finch as the three skippers to watch out for in the ICC World Cup, starting May 30 in the United Kingdom.

Border, who led Australia to World Cup triumph in 1987, said Kohli's aggressive and "in-your-face" style of captaincy makes him a different kind of a leader than Morgan and Finch.

"Virat Kohli, I think he's a different type of captain. He's a bit more of a boisterous-type player and wears his heart on his sleeve," Border told cricket.com.au.

"So the players know if they've stuffed up because he's one of those really in-your-face-type skippers." Border, who captained Australia in 178 ODIs, however refused to rank the trio in any order but is mighty impressed with Morgan under whose leadership England have reached the pinnacle of ODI cricket.

"England, I think they're doing exceptionally well. They've brought a different game plan to the table which is going to be interesting to see how it pans out in the World Cup. They're a dangerous side because of it and you know as the bowling group you're under pressure," he said.