



(L-R) Players of Bangladesh Ansar & VDP go wild following their 15-14 points victory over Bangladesh Police in the final of women's kabaddi event of the Bangabandhu 9th Bangladesh Games at the Kabaddi Stadium in Paltan yesterday. Narail team, meanwhile, clinched gold medal in women's hockey, beating Jhenaidah 1-0 at the Maulana Bhasani Hockey Stadium.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

Ansar and VDP dominate as Games run without incident

SPORTS REPORTER

Curtains will be drawn on the Bangabandhu 9th Bangladesh Games today at the Bangabandhu National Stadium, with all 378 gold medals, barring men's cricket, already being decided at the close of the penultimate day of the 10-day meet in eight different cities across the country.

The cricket final will be held today in Barishal.

One big source of relief and satisfaction for the Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA) is that no athlete was infected by Covid-19 over the past nine days although there was a grave threat which led the government to declare a lockdown in the middle of the Games, which are being held for the first time since 2013.

"We brought approximately 1,800 athletes under Covid-19 testing in the last nine days but no one tested positive and it has been a big relief for us that the Games are going to end in a healthy environment," Games steering committee chairman

HIGHLIGHTS

➤ Bangladesh Ansar clinched the women's kabaddi title with a hard-fought 15-14 win over Bangladesh Police. The men's title went to Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), who beat Bangladesh Air Force 24-22.

➤ Narail became champions in women's hockey with a 1-0 win over Jhenaidah while Bangladesh Army won the men's hockey title.

➤ Chunktia Rowing Club emerged as champions in the women's rowing section while Ali

Nagar Rowing Club won the men's race in Hatirjheel.

➤ Jahangirabad Central Zone and Barendra North Zone will play the men's cricket gold-medal deciding match today in Barisal.

➤ Weightlifting concluded with eight more records, raising the total record tally to 25 in 20 events – 10 for men and 10 for women.

➤ Bangladesh Ansar dominated Judo, winning a total of five of 10 gold medals in the last three days.

and BOA vice president Sheikh Bashir Ahmed told The Daily Star yesterday.

"However, we found a few cases where athletes have either caught a cold or had high temperature but they were kept in isolation and participated in their respective

events after getting Covid-19 negative certificates," Ahmed said, adding that they had ensured the closing ceremony would not need any participation from athletes and instead comprise solely of an audio-visual display of the highlights from the 31 disciplines,

concluding speeches from the guests and a laser show.

"There had been anxiety following the increasing number of Covid-19 cases, but the athletes truly performed better this time around. They also followed health guidelines to make it a success. The medal-giving ceremonies were also really well arranged," Ahmed praised.

Bangladesh Ansar and VDP dominated the top of the table, grabbing more than 120 gold medals, followed by Bangladesh Army, who bagged more than 100 golds. Bangladesh Navy were third with more than 60 gold medals so far. The BOA had not completed the final tally when this report was filed.

Ansar participated in 30 out of 31 disciplines of Bangladesh Games while Bangladesh Army participated in 24 disciplines and Bangladesh Navy took part in only 12.

Of 388 districts and divisional sports associations, clubs, universities, educational boards and services teams, 138 organisations won at least a bronze while 25 organisations shared 378 gold medals.

Shuvagata back as batting all-rounder

SPORTS REPORTER

Thirty four-year-old Shuvagata Hom, who played his last Test against England back in 2016, was re-called to Bangladesh's 21-member preliminary Test squad announced for the upcoming Sri Lanka tour yesterday.

The selectors also included three uncapped pacers – Shoriful Islam, Mukidul Islam and Shohidul Islam – following their impressive performances with the high-performance unit recently.

In absence of star all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan, who has already taken leave for the Indian Premier League, the team management wants to rely on Shuvagata as a batting all-rounder who can bowl off-spin.

Left-arm seamer Mustafizur Rahman, too, will be unavailable for the two-Test series along with young pacer Hasan Mahmud, who had to return to the country from New Zealand after the ODI series due to an injury. Soumya Sarkar, who was included in

PRELIMINARY SQUAD

Mominul Haque, Liton Das, Mohammad Mithun, Mushfiqur Rahim, Tamim Iqbal, Shadman Islam, Abu Jayed Rahi, Tajjul Islam, Najmul Hossain Shanto, Mehedi Hassan Miraz, Nayeem Hasan, Taskin Ahmed, Ebadot Hossain, Saif Hassan, Yasir Ali Chowdhury, Shoriful Islam, Syed Khaled Ahmed, Mukidul Islam Mugdho, Shuvagata Hom, Shohidul Islam, Nurul Hasan Sohan

management is considering Shuvagata as a batting all-rounder this time.

An experienced campaigner in domestic circuit, Shuvagata scored 5268 runs and picked up 213 wickets in 58 first class matches. He was also in fine form in the Bangabandhu National Cricket League, scoring a century and bagging six wickets in the second round match.

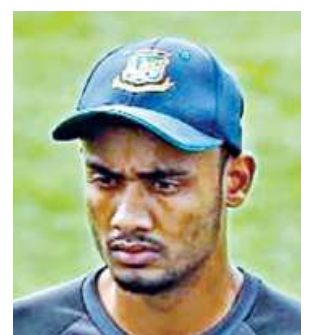
"Shuvagata is coming back after a while but he has been a consistent performer in



Mukidul



Shahidul



Shoriful

the second Test against West Indies earlier this year as a replacement for injured Shakib, was dropped from the Test side. Experienced Mahmudullah Riyad, who was dropped from the Test side last year, was not considered for the tour either.

Mainly a batting all-rounder, Shuvagata made his Test debut against Zimbabwe in 2011. But his role changed in 2014 as management started to consider him as an off-spinner who batted down the order.

Questions started to rise over his role in the playing eleven as the Tigers' former coach Chandika Hathurusingha labelled him as the best off-spinner in the country.

Shuvagata was eventually dropped after he scored just one fifty and picked up eight wickets in eight Tests five years ago. According to chief selector Minhajul Abedin, the team

first class cricket. We have considered him as a batting all-rounder but his off-break is pretty handy and gives us an option in the spin department," said Minhajul.

The Bangladesh team will depart for Sri Lanka on April 12 and then they will travel to Negombo to complete a mandatory room-quarantine for three days.

The team will start training under quarantine protocols on April 15 before taking part in an inter-squad warm-up match on April 17 and 18 at Katunayake. The final squad will be announced following this warm-up match.

The first of the two-match Test series begins on April 21 at the Pallekelle International Cricket Stadium in Kandy, followed by the second Test from April 29 at the same venue.



Marcus Rashford scored in the first half as Manchester United beat Granada 2-0 in the first leg of their Europa League quarterfinal tie in Spain on Thursday, while Arsenal conceded a stoppage-time equaliser in a 1-1 draw at home to Czech champions Slavia Prague. In the other two matches on the night, AS Roma came from behind to beat Ajax 2-1 in Amsterdam while Unai Emery's Villarreal got a 1-0 win away to Dinamo Zagreb.

PHOTO: TWITTER

Real host Barca as title race hots up

REUTERS, Madrid

Barcelona travel to Real Madrid on Saturday in what is set to be one of the most pivotal El Clasico meetings in recent memory, with both sides fast closing in on stuttering Atletico Madrid at the top of the La Liga table.

The Catalans, unbeaten in 19 league games, are just one point off the pace while third-placed Real trail by three points after closing the gap from 10 in February.

Zinedine Zidane's side are also flying high after their comprehensive 3-1 victory over Liverpool in their Champions League quarterfinal first leg on Tuesday.

Madrid forward Karim Benzema has warned that they need to keep Lionel Messi, who has scored 12 goals in his last 10 league appearances, out of the game if they are to get the three points.

"It'll be a tough game against a side who like to dominate the ball," Benzema said.

"They've got a great goalkeeper and of course Messi, the player



(L-R) Real Madrid and Barcelona sweated it out in training on Friday ahead of Saturday's El Clasico, the most pivotal one in recent memory, with both sides fast closing in on stuttering Atletico Madrid at the top of the La Liga table.

PHOTO: TWITTER

who does everything for Barcelona. We need to be wary of him because he's so, so dangerous.

"Just like in the first meeting this season we'll go out on the pitch looking for the win, it's a final for us."

The hosts will be without injured captain Sergio Ramos and centre back partner Raphael

Varane, who is isolating following a positive COVID-19 test.

However, Eden Hazard and Dani Carvajal could both be available for Zidane after returning to full training.

Atletico travel to Real Betis having won just three of their last 10 games in all competitions as they struggle to keep their rivals at bay.



Coach Diego Simeone will be without La Liga's second top scorer Luis Suarez, who has a calf problem, and suspended midfielder Marcos Llorente for the trip to Andalusia.

Joao Felix and Yannick Carrasco are back having missed last weekend's 1-0 defeat to Sevilla through injury.

McIlroy hits dad with errant shot

REUTERS, AUGUSTA

Rory's McIlroy endured his worst ever start to a Masters on Thursday and while it may well leave a mark on his psyche, the Northern Irishman's father may have felt the sting even more after being struck by one of his son's errant shots.

McIlroy, who two weeks ago sent a tee shot into a swimming pool at a Match Play event in Austin, hit his father in the left leg with his second shot at the par-four seventh hole en route to one of six bogeys during a four-over-par 76.

The former world number one, who was tucked behind



a tree leaf of the fairway and with an awkward angle into the green, yelled "fore" as his approach sailed to the other side of the fairway where he knew his father was standing.

"I knew it was my dad when I was aiming at him," said McIlroy. "Probably 30 seconds before it hit him."

McIlroy's father appeared OK as he walked away and even joked with a nearby reporter that he was going to demand an autographed glove from his son.

"He's seen me sign plenty of stuff over the years, so I think that's the least of his worries," said McIlroy. "I think he just needs to go put some ice on it, maybe I'll autograph a bag of frozen peas for him."

For McIlroy, this week marks his seventh attempt to complete the career Grand Slam of golf's four majors,

South Africa, Pakistan clash in shadow of IPL

AFP, Johannesburg

Many of South Africa's best cricketers will be involved in Twenty20 matches on Saturday -- but only some of them will be playing for their country in the first of four T20 internationals against Pakistan at the Wanderers Stadium in Johannesburg.

The series is being played at the same time as the early stages of the Indian Premier League and the juxtaposition provides a clear illustration of the relative standing of the two international teams.

As the first innings in Johannesburg draws to a close on Saturday, Chennai Super Kings and Delhi Capitals will take the field in the IPL. Former South African captain Faf du Plessis, fast bowler Lungi Ngidi and leg-spinner Imran



Tahir are in the CSK squad, while fast bowlers Kagiso Rabada and Anrich Nortje are contracted to Delhi.

Although they may sit out the first round of IPL games because of quarantine restrictions, all three of South Africa's pace battery in the

first two one-day internationals against Pakistan last weekend -- Rabada, Nortje and Ngidi -- will be in Mumbai instead of playing in Johannesburg.

Also in India after playing in the first two games against Pakistan are batsmen Quinton de Kock and

David Miller, while IPL stars AB de Villiers and Chris Morris appear to have been lost to international cricket.

Pakistan, by contrast, have not lost any players to the IPL.

The non-participation of Pakistan players in cricket's richest league owes more to politics than playing ability because the likes of Babar Azam, Fakhar Zaman and Shaheen Shah Afridi would slot comfortably into any IPL side.

South Africa's situation is one of pragmatism.

Cricket South Africa want to stay on the right side of their Indian counterparts by releasing their stars and in any case cannot afford to pay the sort of money that would persuade their leading players to put country ahead of club, especially for a tournament that was arranged less than two months ago.

Zidane wants Messi to stay at Barca

REUTERS, Madrid

Real Madrid coach Zinedine Zidane hopes that Saturday's Clasico meeting between his side and Barcelona will not be the last time Lionel Messi plays in the fixture.

The Barca captain's contract expires this summer and he has been linked with a move away ever since his attempts to leave the club last summer were unsuccessful.

"I hope it's not (Messi's last Clasico), I want him to stay at Barcelona, it's good for the Spanish league," Zidane told a news conference. "We know what a player he is, but they're a very good team and we'll have to try and stop them playing to their strengths and be as good as we can be on the ball and play as best as we can."

Real's club captain Sergio Ramos is another player whose contract expires at the end of the season, and Zidane reiterated his hope that the 35-year-old has not faced Barca for the final time, either.

"Hopefully he's not played his last Clasico. He won't be fit tomorrow, which is a shame, but I hope he stays here," the French coach said.