

SEA Games struck by match-fixing investigation

By **CHUA SIANG YEE**

MEMBERS of Timor Leste's SEA Games team were among a handful of men hauled up by the Corrupt Practices Investigation Bureau (CPIB) yesterday morning for alleged match-fixing offences.

The CPIB said in a statement yesterday afternoon that it arrested "a Singaporean alleged match-fixer and several co-conspirators of different nationalities" for offences under the Prevention of Corruption Act (Chapter 241).

The arrests were made after it launched an operation late on Thursday on information it had received. It is understood that among those arrested is a Timor Leste official, while other members of the Timor Leste team are assisting in investigations.

Timor Leste national football coach Fabio Joaquim Maciel da Silva said he was shocked at the news. "I'm surprised because this morning when I went to training I had three fewer players and I don't know what happened. I told the remaining players to concentrate on training.

"I'm Brazilian, I love football, this is my life and... this team is ready to play football."

Despite the arrests, the Southeast Asian Games Federation and the Singapore SEA Games Organising Committee have confirmed that the 11-team football competition will continue as planned.

Timor Leste is scheduled to play Malaysia tonight in their opening match at Bishan Stadium.

Malaysia coach Ong Kim Swee was disappointed to hear about the arrests and said player safety should be a priority. "Of course it's sad to hear this before the tournament has even started (for Malaysia). This thing has been going on in many tournaments. What is important is to make sure we are safe everywhere we go."

At Days Hotel in Balestier, where the Games' football teams are staying, there was enhanced security yesterday evening, with added uniformed police presence.

Mr Ong said: "Our players had a talk - a week before we came - with the Football Association of Malaysia's Integrity Department regarding this matter and what we need to do is make sure we are focused on this tournament. We'll let the authorities handle it."

This is the latest in a slew of match-fixing cases involving Singaporeans. Last July, Eric Ding Si Yang was jailed for three years for bribing three football match officials. The High Court increased his term to five years in January.

The SEA Games opens officially next Friday and will end on June 16. This is the first time since 1993 that Singapore is hosting the biennial event.

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