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'Brazil are favourites'

"Brazil are the favourites because of the players they have. They can win matches on their own, we can't deny that, but Argentina are among the top teams too. Everybody predicts Brazil will be in the final stages and what we'll do is concentrate and focus on each match to progress as far as possible."

-- Argentine midfielder Juan Roman Riquelme

INTERNET, undated



FIFA WORLD CUP GERMANY 2006

14 DAYS TO GO

Did U Know?

The 1962 edition of the World Cup saw a fatal injury. Then Soviet defender Eduard Dubinski broke a leg during the match against Yugoslavia and later died of complications.

TALK TURKEY



Brian Lara
 (West Indies cricket captain)
 "We depended a lot on Ramnaresh Sarwan for a tremendous innings, and on Shivnarine Chanderpaul. Chanderpaul was injured, and for him to see it through almost to the end was a special effort."
While paying tribute to the two after West Indies won the third one-day international against India on Tuesday.

What to WATCH

TEN Sports
 India v West Indies
 Fourth ODI
 Live at 7:30 pm
ESPN
 England v Sri Lanka
 Second Test, Day 2
 Live at 4:00 pm
Sportscenter India
 Sports news
 Live at 11:00 pm

Rajshahi ride on Rabiul

SPORTS REPORTER

Rabiul hit exactly one hundred as Rajshahi beat Gaibandha by five wickets in the Dhaka Bank Under-19 National Youth Cricket Championship at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Chasing a target of 190 runs, Rabiul hit 12 boundaries and a six to help his team reach the target in the 47th over.

Meanwhile, Rana took four wickets as Barisal won a low-scoring affair against Sylhet by 29 runs at the Jagannath Hall Ground.

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French squad in bust-up session



AFP, Tignes

France coach Raymond Domenech admitted on Thursday that he had had a bust-up with reserve goalkeeper Gregory Coupet but insisted that the matter had since been resolved.

Coupet was seen having a heated exchange with Domenech on Wednesday as the 23-strong French squad continued their World Cup preparations at this ski resort high up in the French Alps.

He then was seen leaving the team hotel in his private car only to return later in the day.

Coupet has admitted he was upset after Domenech named Fabien Barthez as his first-choice goalkeeper for the World Cup even though he had held down the position over the last few games.

"Yes there was a problem between us and we had a heated exchange," said Domenech as the French squad, including Coupet, took part in another training session.

"He lost his head - that happens. A World Cup is not easy to handle. Everyone has to deal with the stress. He left and came back by himself. It all happened very quickly."

"But the problem has been resolved. We spoke about it between ourselves and as far as we are concerned the matter is now over. End of story."

This follows an incident widely reported by newspapers that suggested that there was disharmony in the French squad.

It was reported that following the bust-up, the Lyon player drove off with his family in his private car only to return to the Montana hotel half an hour later.

Coupet was then seen engaged in a heated discussion with Domenech and France assistant coach, Bruno Martini.

It is believed Coupet's fitness

director at Lyon, Robert Duverne, played an instrumental role in persuading him to remain with the squad.

Duverne is part of Domenech's management team helping to ensure France reach the June 9-July 9 finals in the best of health.

The French squad will stay in Tignes until Friday when they travel back to their Clairefontaine base outside Paris.

Barthez was the first choice goalkeeper for France in their glory years when they won the 1998 World Cup and Euro 2000.

But injuries and suspension had opened the door to Lyon keeper Coupet and he had played well during the World Cup qualification campaign.

But in announcing his squad earlier this month, Domenech said that he was re-appointing Barthez as his top goalkeeper for Germany.



WHERE ARE YOU GOING? Number one France goalkeeper Fabien Barthez (R) stares at his dejected deputy Gregory Coupet during the team's training session in Tignes on Thursday.

SL bowled out cheaply



AFP, Birmingham

Chaminda Vaas's defiant 30 not out was not enough to prevent Sri Lanka being bowled out for 141 on the first day of the second Test against England at Edgbaston here Thursday.

Liam Plunkett, who led the hosts' attack with three for 43, took the final catch to dismiss last man Muttiah Muralitharan (one) off the bowling of England captain Andrew Flintoff.

It was a poor return for Sri Lanka after they'd won the toss and batted. And it might have been worse had not Vaas, who faced 78 balls with three fours, and Lasith Malinga put on 50 in 107 balls for the ninth

wicket.

Sri Lanka's total was their second lowest against England after they'd made 81 in Colombo in 2000-01, with only four batsmen reaching double figures.

They resumed after lunch on 65 for six, Durham quick Liam Plunkett taking three wickets, after Farveez Maharoof (five) had been caught behind off Sajid Mahmood to the last ball before lunch.

It did not take long for the next two wickets to fall as Sri Lanka slumped further to 82 for eight.

Flintoff's first ball of his third spell saw a flat-footed Tillakaratne Dilshan, on 27, edge to first slip Marcus Trescothick. And the opening batsman took another good catch as Nuwan Kulasekara (three) went cheaply off Mahmood.

Sri Lanka should then have been

84 for nine when Malinga, still on nought, drove Plunkett to mid-off where Monty Panesar dropped a routine chance.

Left-arm quick Vaas, who'd frustrated England in the drawn first Test at Lord's -- a match where England put down nine catches -- with a gutsy fifty did so again here.

Eventually Flintoff, deputising for the injured Michael Vaughan, decided to add variety to his attack by bringing on left-arm spinner Panesar, the first Sikh to play Test cricket for England, in the 49th over with Sri Lanka 129 for eight.

It was a move that reaped a quick reward, Panesar having Malinga lbw for Test-best 26 fifth

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Dhaka prisoners to enjoy World Cup

AFP, Dhaka

Prisoners in Bangladesh will be able to watch World Cup football for the first time, authorities said Thursday.

"The country's prisoners can watch the World Cup football for the first time as all the prisons now have televisions after we introduced them in 2003," said inspector general of prisons Brigadier General Zakir Hossain.

Hossain said they would let inmates watch matches live on state-run Bangladesh Television, which owns the rights.

There are 71,000 prisoners in the country's 66 prisons.

The month-long World Cup beginning on June 9 is expected to draw record television audiences in the sport-obsessed nation.

Chess Olympiad Men make comeback

SPORTS REPORTER

The men on the Bangladesh chess team returned to winning ways in the 37th World Chess Olympiad when they handed a 2.5-1.5 defeat to Austria in the fourth round in Turin, Italy yesterday.

FM Mehedi Hasan defeated IM Alviraco while GM Ziaur Rahman, IM Reefat Bin Sattar and IM Abdullah Al Rakib drew their matches.

Meanwhile, after two consecutive triumphs against New Zealand and International Committee for Silent Chess (ICSC), the women's team drew against Iran.

WIM Rani Hamid beat WIM Atousa and WFM Tanima Parveen drew against WFM Shirin, but Nazrana lost to WIM Taleghani Shayesten.

After the fourth round of matches, the men's team secured nine points while women's team are now at 6.5 points.

SA GAMES CAMP Top four will be sent to Colombo

BDNEWS, Dhaka

Only the top four performers of the training camp will represent Bangladesh in individual events in the South Asian (SA) Games in Colombo this August.

The decision was taken yesterday at a meeting of the presidents and general secretaries of the 18 federations with Bangladesh Olympic Association (BOA) president and Chief of Army Staff Lt Gen

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Surprises may shower



REUTERS, Berlin

The weather in Germany could be as full of surprises as the soccer during the World Cup, with cold fronts, heatwaves, heavy rain, bright blue skies or severe thunderstorms among the myriad of possibilities.

Weather forecasters are loath to predict more than seven days ahead even though computers have improved the reliability of medium-range outlooks to 95 percent since the last World Cup held here in 1974.

Past June-July weather data is also a poor guide because the northern European country with both continental and maritime influences can have damp and chilly weather or hot and dry spells. Some years have maddening bouts of both in quick succession.

"You can't predict what will happen in June because there will

always be surprises," said Gerhard Lux, a meteorologist at the Deutscher Wetterdienst (DWD), the national weather service.

"Everything is possible," he told Reuters. "It depends on many factors, especially on whether the prevailing winds are from the west, which are often wet and cool.

"Or they could be from the north, which are often cold, or southwesterly winds, which are moist and warm, or from the south, which are hot, or southeast, which are dry," Lux said.

Because heavy rain played a role in 1974, especially when the West German hosts beat Poland 1-0 in the "Wasserschlacht von Frankfurt" ("Water battle of Frankfurt"), the heavens will be on the minds of players, coaches, fans and bookmakers.

The historical data show a wide range. The June average is 15.4 degrees Celsius but a June average low record of 11.2 was set in 1923 and an average high of 19.4 in 2003. An all-time June low of 2.4 degrees below zero was recorded in Obertsdorf in 1962 and a high of 38.2 degrees was set in 1947 in

Frankfurt.

A storm with tennis-ball-size hail hit Munich on July 12, 1984, injuring 300 people and causing a record 3 billion marks (\$1.4 billion) in damages to cars and buildings. There have also been tornados and severe thunderstorms in June in recent years.

June weather can be unsettled but farmers and weather-watchers pay attention to some key dates.

The first is the so-called "Schafskaelte" -- or "sheep's cold spell" -- and temperatures sometimes drop by about 10 degrees to five to 10 degrees when it hits around June 9 -- the opening day of the finals this year.

The next critical date is June 27. According to German folklore, if it rains on this day, it will rain for the next seven weeks. But if it is sunny, statistics show the next few weeks are also warm and dry about 70 percent of the time.

Other meteorologists have examined the weather data since

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IT HAS GOT TO BE SAMBA: Two Brazilian fans enjoy the training of their national team in Weggis, Switzerland on Thursday.

PHOTO: AFP