

What to WATCH

DAY'S EVENT

BTV & RTV

Bangabandhu Gold Cup Semifinal

Palestine v Seychelles

Live from 5:00 pm

STAR SPORTS SELECT 1

English Premier League

Manchester Utd v Burnley

Live from 2:15 am (Thursday)

STAR SPORTS SELECT 2

English Premier League

Tottenham v Norwich City

Live from 1:30 am (Thursday)

SONY SIX & TEN 2

Australian Open

Live from 6:00 am & 2:30 pm

Bangabandhu Gold Cup Semifinal

Palestine v Seychelles

Time: 5:00 pm

Venue: Bangabandhu National Stadium, Dhaka

INSIGNE SAYS SORRY TO YOUNG FAN

Napoli captain Lorenzo Insigne has apologised to a nine-year-old fan after the team's dismal performance in a 2-0 home defeat by Fiorentina on Saturday made the boy burst into tears. The image of the tearful fan with a Napoli scarf appeared during the broadcast of the match and was widely posted on social media, prompting some supporters to suggest it be hung on the dressing-room wall to motivate the team. "I'm sorry that the result made you cry," Insigne said in a video to the fan, named as Mario, which was posted on several Italian websites. "We promise that from now until the end we will have a great championship and you will smile with us again. We are waiting for you at the stadium. A big hug."

--REUTERS





# Visual pollution and the Grand Slim

AFP, Melbourne

**Stomach for a fight**  
Britain's Dan Evans insists he's in good nick after coming through a five-set epic at the Australian Open, patting his stomach in celebration in a nod to the doubters. Ahead of the tournament his ATP Cup captain Tim Henman suggested Evans lose weight and "miss a few meals" if he wants to go far at the Grand Slam. "It was just a bit of a joke to the guys in the corner," Evans told reporters of the tummy pat, after beating American Mackenzie McDonald 3-6, 4-6, 6-1, 6-2, 6-3. "I'm in good shape -- there's no question about that. I've got strong legs and a good set of lungs."

**'Visual pollution'**  
Grigor Dimitrov has never been afraid of making a fashion statement, and his outlandish tracksuit at the Australian Open certainly turned a few heads. The Bulgarian strutted on court in a dark purple number with random yellow shapes, an outfit that sent social media into overdrive with one punter calling it "visual pollution" and another suggesting he forgot to take off his pyjamas. Dimitrov said he likes being different. "I love colours... I love experimenting as well

and when I'm out there, I don't really think that much of the outfit. But it's so good to feel comfortable."

**Cheers from the crowd**  
Australia's John Millman is all for rowdy spectators getting in the mood with a drink -- or three or four. The 30-year-old defeated France's Ugo Humbert in four sets and said afterwards that the backing of the vocal home crowd was something he "loved" and "needs". One of the sponsors in Melbourne is a Chinese liquor, and that's just fine with Millman. "I know that the Chinese one's a really strong alcohol so let's feed the crowd," he said, before adding quickly: "I don't encourage binge-drinking, guys, so please don't quote me on that."

**Generous to a fault**  
Most players aren't happy about serving double faults but they're no problem for Belinda Bencic, who has pledged to donate to Australia's bushfire relief each time. The Swiss world number seven sent down four doubles in her win over Anna Schmiedlova, clocking up US\$800 for the cause after deadly wildfires torched thousands of homes. "It's great. I could have done more, but I didn't," she said.

## French player denies disrespect

REUTERS, Undated

French player Elliot Benchetrit on Tuesday denied having showed a lack of respect to a ball girl at the Australian Open after asking her to peel a banana for him during a qualifications match last weekend. The umpire told Benchetrit the girl did not have to do this for him, but the player had an explanation for the unusual request. "I had put some powder on my hands to stop sweating," Benchetrit told reporters after his 6-2 6-0 6-3 defeat in the first round in Melbourne against Japan's Yuichi Sugita. "The bananas are very hard to peel here because they don't have a stem. I asked the ball kid nicely because she had already peeled one for me at the beginning of the match," he explained. "The umpire intervened and told me: 'She's not your slave, you cannot ask her that'. He said 'Slave!'"

# Nadal sizzles in pink as Sharapova hits all-time low

AFP, Melbourne

Top seed Rafael Nadal turned on the style as he launched his bid for a record-equalling 20th Major title at the Australian Open on Tuesday, but falling star Maria Sharapova hit a career low. Australia's Nick Kyrgios also cantered into the second round, but fourth seed Daniil Medvedev had to fight his way past American Frances Tiafoe in four sets. Nadal, one shy of Roger Federer's Grand Slam mark, dropped only five games as he swatted aside Bolivia's Hugo Dellien 6-2, 6-3, 6-0 in just over two hours at a sunny Rod Laver Arena. "It was a positive start," said the reigning Roland Garros and US Open champion, wearing a bright pink singlet and matching trainers. "What you want in the first round is just to win, and it's better if it's in straight sets." He joins Federer and defending champion Novak Djokovic in round two as the Big Three look to tighten a stranglehold that has brought them all but one of the last 14 Australian Open titles. Nadal, the first player to be world number one in three different decades, is still thriving at 33 but it's a different story for five-time Grand Slam winner Sharapova.

The 32-year-old, playing on a wildcard as she wrestles with a shoulder injury, lost 3-6, 4-6 to Croatian 19th seed Donna Vekic, making her an opening-round loser at three straight Grand Slams for the first time. The future looks uncertain for the former world number one, who won Wimbledon when she was just 17 but has not reached a Grand Slam final since she lifted the 2014 French Open trophy. "I can speak about my struggles and the things that I've gone through with my shoulder, but it's not really in my character to," Sharapova said. "I was there, I put myself out there (playing). As tough as it was, I finished the match -- it wasn't the way that I wanted." Britain's Johanna Konta, a two-time Slam semi-finalist, also fell at the first hurdle as she battles to overcome a knee problem, losing 4-6, 2-6 to unseeded Tunisian Ons Jabeur. On a bumper day of 88 first-round matches, after rain wiped out half of Monday's schedule, former US Open champion Marin Cilic and Milos Raonic both moved safely through. Italy's Fabio Fognini, two sets down against America's Reilly Opelka when their match was suspended on Monday, returned to win it in five after a stormy encounter when both players argued furiously with the umpire.

A new star emerged in 18-year-old Italian Jannik Sinner, last year's NextGen champion, who earned his first Grand Slam victory against Australia's Max Purcell. Australia's Kyrgios, who has spearheaded fundraising efforts for the country's deadly bushfire disaster, kept his notorious temper in check despite being taken to two tie-breaks in a 6-2, 7-6 (7/3), 7-6 (7-1) win over Lorenzo Sonego of Italy. "I feel super-comfortable, you guys are the best. I feel the support.... I am ready to go again," Kyrgios told the crowd. Medvedev, the narrow loser to Nadal in September's US Open final, dropped the second set against Tiafoe before recovering to win 6-3, 4-6, 6-3, 6-2. Austria's Dominic Thiem, who has reached the last two French Open finals, went through in straight sets against Adrian Mannarino, while 2014 champion Stan Wawrinka needed four to get past Amir Dzumhur. There was disappointment for France's Jo-Wilfried Tsonga, the 2008 finalist, when he had to retire with a back injury against Australia's Alexei Popyrin. Air pollution from the bushfires disrupted the build-up to the year's first Grand Slam, but after Monday's heavy rain the skies were clear and sunny on Tuesday.

AFP, Bagnolet

Kylian Mbappe says he is dreaming of helping Paris Saint-Germain win a first Champions League trophy this year, as well as leading France to the title at Euro 2020 and the Olympic Games in Tokyo. The 21-year-old PSG and France star, a World Cup winner in 2018, was asked what was on his wish list for the new year while launching his charity in the Paris suburbs on Monday. "It would be a treble of Champions League, European Championship and Olympic Games. That wouldn't be bad," said Mbappe, with a smile. "That seems unattainable for the time being but I'm going to make sure I fulfil this dream. It would be a proud moment to be able win the first European title for PSG and for our country to keep winning." Mbappe's charity, "Inspired by KM", was set up to help 98 children -- a nod to his birth year -- between the ages of nine and 16 from various social backgrounds to accomplish "their dreams". Last month, Mbappe put himself forward for the French team at the Tokyo Olympics, while adding he would not



want to fight his club over taking part in Japan. "Playing in the Olympics, I don't control everything," he told France Football magazine. "Of course I want to go, but if my club, which is my employer, doesn't want me to go, I won't force a clash."

## Palestine oozing confidence

SPORTS REPORTER

Palestine are looking forward to confirming the final berth of the Bangabandhu Gold Cup as the defending champions take on Seychelles in the first semifinal at the Bangabandhu National Stadium today. The match will get underway at 5:00pm. Palestine, the top-ranked side in the six-nation tournament, stormed into the last four with wins over Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. The side from the Middle East had four days' rest before their fixture against Seychelles, who scraped into the last four due to better goal-difference after playing a 2-2 draw against Mauritius following a 3-1 defeat against group champions Burundi. Despite being confident about keeping the winning streak intact, Palestine are focused on their own performance rather than thinking much of the opponents. "Sometimes long rest leads to both positives and negatives, but we are focusing on positive things as we have come here to win the trophy. We watch their [Seychelles] two group matches, but we are focusing only on our team because we have confidence in our players," Palestine coach Makram Daboub said at a pre-match conference at the BFF house yesterday. Makram's counterpart Ralph Jean Louis was worried about the players' fatigue as they got only one day's rest before the semifinal. "The players got tired in the late stages of the last game [on Monday]. We have to minimise the fatigue of the players," Louis said. "Palestine are very good technically and tactically and we are wary of them. Hopefully it will be a competitive game."

# Young Riyadul out to fill big shoes

SPORTS REPORTER

With scoring always being a cause for concern for the national team, there is now the additional worry in defence ahead of their Bangabandhu Gold Cup's semifinal clash against Burundi as the charges of Jamie Day will be without experienced centre-backs Tapu Barman and Yeasin Khan. The coach had picked four centre-backs including Tapu, Yeasin along with young Tutul Hossain Badsha and Riyadul Hasan, but only Riyadul will be available for the semifinal as Badsha and Yeasin left the squad with fever while Tapu faces one-match suspension for seeing a red card against Sri Lanka. The absence of three centre-backs will put Bangladesh in deep trouble against Burundi, who have one of the best attacking forces as they have scored seven goals in two group matches against Mauritius and Seychelles. But Day, during training yesterday, instead of thinking too much of his own defence, was more focused on how to unsettle the Burundi defence with quick moves to get goals. After releasing the ball from the centre area, Day shouted one, two, three, four and shot on the target as play was built up through the wings and the forwards finished every move with shots on target. Three goals against Sri Lanka in the final group match might have given the home side some confidence, but the defence will have to play a key role to ensure the final berth of the tournament after five years. Riyadul is fully confident of taking the responsibility on his shoulders. "The absence of Tapu and Yeasin bhai is not a worry for us, rather it is challenge for ones who are going to play against Burundi. I am ready to take the responsibility to lead the defence," Riyadul said. "The difference between the national team players is little, so the absence of anyone can hardly be felt but the absence of Tapu bhai and Yeasin bhai is quite something.



**Young centre-back Riyadul Hasan (R) watches as Rahmat Mia (L) and Matin Mia vie for the ball during a training session at the Sheikh Jamal Dhanmondi Club ground yesterday.** PHOTO: BFF  
I think Rahmat Mia and Bishwanath Ghosh are also playing regularly, so we will not face much trouble." Following injury to Badsha, Riyadul was given the chance to play alongside Yeasin in the two-match series against Bhutan last September, and the Saif SC defender passed those tests successfully to get chances against Qatar and India in the World Cup Qualifiers in October. The defender impressed all in both games with whole-hearted performances. "Burundi like to play directly with long ball. Our defenders will try to not concede any goal and keep the slate clean. I know I have more responsibility in absence of two senior players," said Riyadul. After missing the match against Sri Lanka due to pain on upper side of his left knee, skipper Jamal Bhuiyan yesterday had full training. He was not too worried about the defence. "Burundi have a strong attacking line-up and they are also physically stronger than us. The coach will see who will be suitable in place of Tapu, who was a vital player for us. We have Raihan Hasan and Manjurur Rahman Manik in reserve," said Jamal. "We had a training on quick attacks as Burundi players do not run back and their defence is not organised either. If we play like this, we can penetrate them," Jamal said. "I think if we can score first, we can hold the lead because we have the capability of doing that."

## WOMEN'S HANDBALL

# Ansar win 18th title

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh Ansar emerged champions in the Bangabandhu 30th National Women's Handball Championship following a 33-25 goals victory against Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation at the Shaheed M Mansur Ali National Handball Stadium yesterday. It was overall 18th title for Bangladesh Ansar, who dominated the first half by 16-11 as Khadiza scored highest 11 goals for the winners. Alpana Akter of Ansar was named best player of the championship.

## FEDERATION CUP TT

# Hamza stuns Manosh in final

SPORTS REPORTER

Mufradul Khayer Hamza became the new champion in men's table tennis singles of the Federation Cup table tennis tournament after beating Manosh Chowdhury in an exciting final at Shaheed Tajuddin Ahmed Indoor Stadium yesterday. Hamza came from behind to beat former champion Manosh in 4-3 sets. Manosh had taken the lead by winning the first two sets 11-9, 11-3 but Hamza bounced back to win the next three sets 11-9, 12-10 and 11-9. In the sixth set, Monosh beat Hamza 11-7 to level the tie but the final set went in favour of Hamza, who beat the experienced player 12-10. In women's singles, Sonom Sultana Soma beat Nowrin Sultana Mahi in 4-2 sets to be crowned champion.