

Fixtures frustrate Ferguson

LONDON, Dec 24: As English football prepares for its busiest period of the year with four games in eight days, Manchester United Manager Alex Ferguson has criticised those who plan the fixtures over the holiday period, reports AFP.

With most Premiership games kicking off three hours earlier than normal, Ferguson, who takes his side to Chelsea on Monday, annoyed that the fans are being made to suffer.

Ferguson said: "There are plenty of clubs in the north, but instead of going to places within easy reach like Liverpool; Everton or Manchester City, our fans have to get to London and Southampton."

"You would think the planners would take distance into account at times like this."

It is an important game for Chelsea badly needing a boost after a dismal run of two wins in 11 games with only one goal in their last five outings.

Chelsea wait on fitness tests for skipper Dennis Wise and defender Frank Sinclair, while United should have England centre-back Gary Pallister fit after a groin problem. Ryan Giggs is set to play with a lightweight protective plaster on his wrist after breaking a bone last Saturday.

Premiership leaders Blackburn, though, will not have far to travel as they visit Manchester City with a two-point lead over United at the top of the table after a run of seven wins in their last eight league games.

Manager Kenny Dalglish stayed away from training with a stomach bug on Friday, but Rovers will welcome back defender Colin Hendry from international duty.

England midfielder Paul Bracewell is set to start his first Premiership game of the season as third-placed Newcastle travel to Leeds.

Bracewell, who has had five groin operations this year, has been on the bench for Newcastle's last two games.

England central defender Steve Howey, who missed the league cup defeat by Manchester City in midweek because of illness, and England midfielder Robert Lee are also back in contention.

Brian Deane starts a two-match suspension but Leeds have skipper Gary McAllister back from international duty with Scotland.



ALEX FERGUSON - Manager Howard Wilkinson is usually reluctant to change a winning side but McAllister is certain to regain his place in midfield after missing the 3-1 win at Arsenal.

With Deane out, South African Phil Masinga is set to continue in the attack after his two goals at Highbury.

Nottingham Forest may welcome back defender Colin Cooper who has missed three matches with an ankle injury with Norwegian Alf Inge Haaland likely to make way.

Dutch striker Bryan Roy has a groin injury and manager Frank Clark has put Jason Lee on standby as Forest look to build on last week's 2-1 at Old Trafford.

Guy Whittingham, will make his debut for Sheffield Wednesday at Everton following his 750,000 pounds move from Aston Villa in midweek.

But Wednesday have doubts about Andy Sinton, who missed last week's defeat by QPR match with a thigh injury.

Everton, who last week established a club record of going over 11 hours without conceding a goal, welcome back 4 million pound striker Duncan Ferguson from Scotland duty.

Whittingham was part-exchanged for Ian Taylor who will make his Villa debut in his preferred central midfield role at Arsenal.

Villa's failure to deliver goals this season is a problem that little hopes Taylor, who scored 35 in two seasons with Port Vale, with help to solve.

Taylor could replace Kevin Richardson, but Republic of Ireland skipper Andy Townsend is also back in contention after completing a six-match suspension.

Coventry striker Dion Dublin has had a painkilling injection in a bid to play against Nottingham Forest at Highfield Road.

Dublin, scorer of 10 goals in 14 games, has missed three matches after tearing a stomach muscle but though he has recovered from that, the 2 million pound player now has a groin strain.

German striker Jurgen Klinsmann, back from international duty, is set to return for Spurs who travel to Norwich and will be having his first experience of football over the Christmas period.

Klinsmann said: "It will seem a bit strange, but that is the way of things in the English league and as a professional I must go along with it."

Norwich City manager John Deehan will be forced to reshuffle his midfield as Mike Milligan starts a two match suspension with Jeremy Goss set to make a return to the side.

Southampton have six players struggling to be fit for their clash with Wimbledon at the Dell.

West Ham entertain Ipswich but with Don Hutchison John Moncur and Martin Allen are still recovering from injuries; manager Harry Redknapp is likely to retain the side which thrashed Manchester City 3-0 last week.

Maradona joins Racing Club as coach

BUENOS AIRES, Dec 24: Diego Maradona signed up as coach of Racing Club on Friday, his second coaching stint since a failed drug test got him banned from the playing field, reports AP.

After signing a one-year contract reportedly worth \$1.5 million, Maradona vowed to break the 28-year spell in which Racing Club has failed to win the first division championship.

"Racing Club is a huge challenge and I'm here to win titles," the former national team captain told reporters.

Racing Club, based in a working class suburb of Buenos Aires, last won the first division title in 1966. The following year it beat Scotland's Celtic to win the Intercontinental Cup.

Considered a sleeping giant of Argentine soccer, the success-starved club has fired 50 coaches in the last 20 years.

Maradona, 34, lasted eight weeks in his first coaching job at Deportivo Mandiyu. He quit early December after his team, last in the standings, won just one match out of twelve.

Maradona is completing a 15-month ban from soccer after failing a drug test at the World Cup finals. He has recently hinted at a comeback as a player once the suspension is lifted in October 1995.

FIFA, the governing body of world soccer, has said it has no objections to the controversial star pursuing a career in coaching.

Parreira worried

RIO DE JANEIRO, Dec 24: World Cup winning coach Carlos Alberto Parreira on Thursday expressed his concern at the exodus of Brazil's players to Japan, reports AFP.

The current coach of Valencia said: "This exodus could create problems in the formation and preparation of future national teams."

Parreira had just arrived here from Spain to spend Christmas and New Year in his home country. He added players would need longer to recover from a 24-hour journey from Japan because of worse jet lag than those coming from Europe.

Kashima Antlers' Alcindo and Bellmare Hiratsuka's Betinho were second and third in Japan's 1994 goalscoring list with 28 and 24 goals respectively.

2 more held in Malaysian soccer scandal

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 24: Malaysian police Wednesday detained two more footballers and suspected bookie, bringing to 47 the number of people arrested in a growing probe into soccer match-fixing, reports AFP.

The suspected bookie, a 40-year-old businessman, was detained in Malaysia's southern Johore state, a federal police spokesman, Azhar Kadir, was quoted by Bernama news agency as saying.

Azhar said the two footballers surrendered themselves to police earlier Wednesday, raising the number of players in police detention to 26 to date.

They were named as Badrul Isham Jailil from the southwestern Malacca state team and Zulkifli Hassan from the northern Kedah team.

The others picked up since the crackdown began in October, among them former players, were either freed on bail pending further action, or kept to assist police in investigations.

Sports officials said they expected more players to be arrested as police intensify the inquiry that began following allegations that players were accepting bribes to fix national premier league and Malaysia Cup matches.

Panzanini's 1st

ALTA BADIA, Italy, Dec 24: Sabina Panzanini of Italy scored her first ever World Cup triumph Wednesday, beating Austrian Anita Wachter by 0.47 seconds in the women's giant slalom race, reports AP.

The 22-year-old Italian skier, born in nearby Merano, broke into tears and whispered "It's a dream. I can't believe it" after clocking an unbeatable combined time of two minutes, 21.03 seconds down the Gran Risa track in this Dolomite valley.

Eachter, fastest in the first run with a one hundredth of a second edge over Panzanini, was slowed down by a bad mistake in the upper part of the second run and finished second in 2:21.50.

Another Italian, Olympic giant slalom champion Deborah Compagnoni, made a successful comeback from a one-month illness capturing third place in 2:22.14.

Germany's Martina Ertl edged American Eva Twardokens for fourth place.

'Surfacing success' seamy side

PARIS, Dec 24: When the Chinese heralded in the year of the dog last January little did the country's sports authorities realise just what a dog of a year it would turn out to be, reports AFP.

"By the time December came, China's sports machine had been disgraced by one of the biggest drug scandals in recently."

The China connection has only helped underline how drugs have seemingly become a key player in international success.

A host of top athletes from the west are strongly suspected of using drugs but despite the use of widespread testing the private chemists



An AFP file photo of Chinese swimmer Lu Bin, who won the silver medal on the 100m freestyle event at the World Championships in Rome on Sept 6, tested positive for drugs.

and doctors employed by the athletes are more skillful than the testers.

At this year's Commonwealth Games, when word leaked out that a British athlete was positive the press almost began writing about the demise of a famous runner.

In the end the stories remain unpublished. Not because they were not true but simply because it had in fact been another athlete who had been caught.

While the Ben Johnson affair in Seoul made the International Olympic Committee look to be doing something about the gold medal cheats, senior IOC officials admit privately that the testing system is still far from perfect.

"We know some of the biggest names in sport are taking drugs. We know who they are. But so far we have been unable to prove it," said one IOC official recently.

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Soviet gymnast Olga Kovalenko who won an Olympic gold in Mexico in 1968.

Now 44-year-old, Kovalenko broke down during a German television interview and revealed how she was pressured to become pregnant and then have an abortion.

"The doctors told us that the body of a pregnant woman

urine tests. You see these guys meandering around for years doing nothing and all of a sudden they're winning tournaments. Beta-blockers are not illegal. They just make a remarkable difference," he claimed.

His comments produced an outcry of protests, mostly from golfers claiming O'Grady was talking nonsense, but the affair was quickly put aside.

Golfing authorities would do well to pay attention of their lack of action could come back to haunt them. No sport now seems safe from the drug cheats — certainly not after what 1994 produced.

produced more male hormones and could therefore become stronger, I was told that if I refused I would not have been sent to the Games," said Kovalenko.

Football found itself dragged into the drug cesspool when Argentina's Diego Maradona failed a dope test during the World Cup. The stocky Maradona, who had surprised everyone by his dramatic return to form, pleaded innocent but FIFA, the sport's ruling body, was having none of it.

Maradona must have taken a cocktail of drugs," was how Michel D'Hooghe, FIFA's official doctor, described the concoction found in the player's system.

Even the gentlemen's sport of golf found itself embroiled in doping.

Failed American tour player Mac O'Grady claimed that dope-taking was going on inside the PGA tour.

"Golf should have random

Part of it read: "We feel it is our duty to inform you that should the athlete (Modhal) be eventually rendered ineligible according to IAAF rules and procedures, any result achieved by the British women's team would, regrettably, not be considered valid in the standings of the competition."

After the IAAF decision on Friday, its spokesman Christopher Winner told Reuters: "Some say we should be more forgiving, but casual forgiveness does not honour the sport."

"Our September warning was clear, and we have no choice but to abide by those warnings. Diane Modhal is now guilty of a drug offence, whatever subsequent may yield.

Nonetheless, the IAAF's decision comes after many hours of discussion, which reflects how hard it is to penalise so many for the offence of one. If there is a silver lining, however, thin, it is that no world records were set.

But a team is by definition composed of individuals and we cannot realistically penalise a team and at the same time pretend that the individual records are a thing apart."

The Chinese Swimming Association punished women Lu Bin and Zhou Guanbin and men Xiong Guomin, Hu Bin, Zhang Bin and Fu Young with two-year suspensions, the same as it meted out last month to a seventh swimmer, Yang Alhua.

The Chinese Track and Field Association banned hurdler Han Qing, a woman, for four years.

Canoists Zhang Lei and Qiu Suoren, both men, were banned for two years by the Chinese Canoe Association and cyclist Wang Yan, a woman, was banished for six months by the Chinese Cycling Association.

The suspensions accorded with standard penalties adopted by the international swimming body FINA and other associations.

World champs beat Y'slavia

PORTO ALEGRE, Brazil, Dec 24: Yugoslavia lost 2-0 to world champions Brazil on Friday in their first match since they were thrown out of international soccer two years ago, reports Reuter.

Yugoslavia, who can now call only on players from the republics of Serbia and Montenegro, appeared to be in no fit state for a match after disembarking at 2.30 am in the morning of the game after a marathon Transatlantic journey.

When they took the field in searing heat, Corinthians striker Viola, who made a tremendous impact when he came on as a substitute in extra time of the World Cup final against Italy in July, opened

Beckenbauer calls on UEFA to end stupid games

BONN, Dec 24: German soccer supremo Franz Beckenbauer said on Friday that forcing the German national team to play against nations such as Albania and Moldova was a "stupid game", reports Reuter.

Beckenbauer called on UEFA to end these "stupid games" and said smaller countries should play separate qualifiers in international competitions, allowing the "great" soccer nations to play against each other.

"When I think of international matches, I imagine clashes with the great nations, Italy, England, the Netherlands. But at the moment we have to wait two years before we meet these soccer greats," Beckenbauer said in a newspaper commentary.

"That's why games against countries like Moldova are a slight to the German national squad. They're just stupid."

Former world champions Germany defeated Moldova 3-0 on Wednesday and face Albania in Kaiserslautern on Sunday in the European Championships.

"Moldova, Albania or whatever all these countries are called, should first play qualifiers and only later face the soccer greats," Beckenbauer wrote in the mass-circulation Bild.

The Bayern Munich chairman complained that there were now so many countries competing in international soccer competitions that qualifying groups were "almost totally made up of exotic teams."

"Sure, we have to help these countries. We should be sending them money but please, don't let them play for points in the European Championships."

Beckenbauer, who inspired Bayern to three European Cup triumphs in the mid-1970s, has not hesitated in recent months to sound off about any subject that takes his fancy.

the scoring in the 26th minute.

Full-back Branco scored the second in the 65th minute with a pile-driver free-kick.

The Yugoslavs, with 10 foreign-based players in their starting line-up, were so leaden-footed that on several occasions their defence was outpaced by Branco, a player notoriously short of pace.

Milan striker Dejan Savicevic made only one notable contribution throughout the game with a 35th minute run in which he beat three Brazilian defenders, only to find at the end that he had nobody to cross to.

Brazil, with nine members of their World Cup squad in the time, played a controlled possession game well suited to the conditions.

Brazil dominated the first half, with PSV Eindhoven's 18-year-old striker Ronaldo missing three clearcut chances. The goal was a gem, with Branco playing a one-two with Zinho and crossing to the far post for Viola to score with a header.

It was Viola's second goal for Brazil in eight appearances and a boost for a player who did not score in the Brazilian Championship for two months. The pattern continued in

the second half, during which the exhausted Yugoslavs made five substitutions, and in the 65th minute Branco scored with a rifling, 30-metre left-foot free-kick which bounced off the crossbar.

It was the former Genoa and Porto player's ninth goal for his country. Full-back Jorginho and Ronaldo both had further efforts saved by goalkeeper Goran Pandurovic.

Valencia striker Perag Mujatovic had Yugoslavia's best effort when he shot across the face of the goal early in the second half.

TEAMS

BRAZIL: 1-Zetti, 2-Jorginho, 3-Aldair, 4-Marcio Santos, 6-Branco, 5-Cesar Sampaio, 8-Dunga, 11-Zinho, 7-Marques, (22-Savio, 80th minute), 9-Viola, 10-Ronaldo (21-Marcelinho Pereira, 66th).

YUGOSLAVIA: 1-Goran Pandurovic (12-Aleksander Kocić, 81st), 2-Slobodan Kocić (13-Goran Sula, 68th), 5-Miroslav Djukic, 3-Slobodan Dubajic (14-Goran Djorovic, 60th), 4-Branko Brnovic, 6-Slavisa Jokanovic (19-Dejan Govedarica, 75th), 7-Vladimir Jugovic, 10-Dragan Stokjovic, 11-Sinisa Mihajlovic, 9-Predrag Mijatovic (18-Savo Milosevic, 56th), 8-Dejan Savicevic.



Argentinian soccer star Diego Maradona arrives at Jose Marti airport in Havana yesterday. He is in Cuba with his family for holidays at the invitation of a local hotel. — AFP photo

COC to probe doping cases

BEIJING, Dec 24: China said on Saturday it had established a panel to investigate a scandal involving 11 top athletes, suspended after they were found to have used banned performance-enhancing drugs, reports Reuter.

The Chinese Olympic Committee (COC) has set up a three-member panel to "make a thorough investigation to get to the bottom of the case," the Xinhua news agency said. It did not elaborate.

China on Tuesday announced the suspension of the 11, including seven from its prestigious swimming team, from local and international competition for up to four years after they tested positive for drugs at October's Asian Games in Hiroshima.

There has been no word on whether their coaches have been punished.

China has said the suspensions demonstrated its vigilance against doping in sport.

China's doping control centre tested 1,608 athletes in 1993, 24 of whom included world stars who tested positive and have all been punished. Xinhua quoted centre director Yang Inate saying.

The facts show that the COC has been very serious towards the anti-doping problems, the agency said.

Earlier this month, the Olympic Council of Asia stripped the 11 of their Asian Games medals after their urine samples showed traces of DHT, or dehydrotestosterone, a performance-enhancing hormone banned by the International Olympic Committee.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

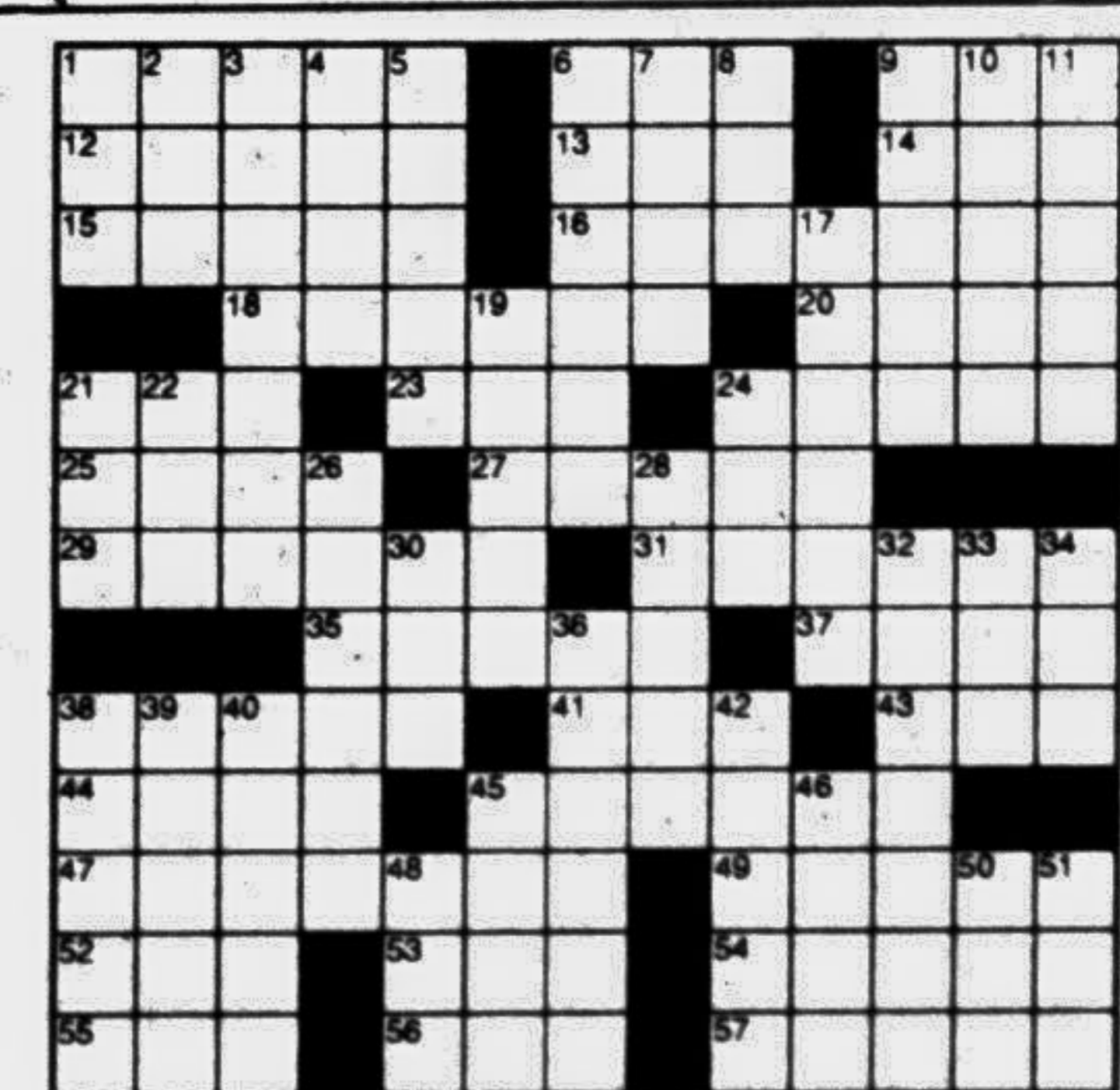
ACROSS

1 Mar. 17 honoree
6 "— not choose to run"
9 Almost used up
12 Disgrace
13 Melody
14 Spanish queen
15 Tend a stubborn shoeleace
16 Coincides
18 Hansel and Gretel's trail
20 Pro follower
21 Jongg lead-in
23 Luau gunk
24 "Hammer-in" Hank
25 Guinness or Waugh
27 Squamous
29 Supporters of the museum?
31 Sullen look
35 Six-Day War Vif
37 Appellation
38 He met Sally, in a movie

41 Just out
43 Monkey suit
44 Jai —
45 Tile art
47 Snags a hole
49 Bandleader Jones
52 Everything the builder needs
53 Inventor Whitney
54 Emulated Washington?
55 Ship's timber curve
56 Kingston Trio hit of 1959
57 Criteria DOWN
1 Georgia, Solution time: 26 mins.

once: abbr.
2 Article in your newspaper?
3 Fixes a hole
4 Arabian bigwig
5 Prepare to drive
6 Like pentamer, often
7 "Buenos —"
8 Scrap
9 "Merry Widow" composer
10 — a customer
11 "There — old woman..."

17 It has drawing power
19 Unlike rolling stones
21 West of Hollywood
22 Carte lead-in
24 The whole shootin' match
26 Actor Hardwicke
28 DeMille or Moorehead
30 Deposit
32 Keeps an eye on
33 Ostrich's cousin
34 King (Lat.)
36 Butterfly genus
38 Cabbies
39 Actor Delon
40 Wretched
42 Locale for an obi
45 Tuna sandwich of a sort
46 Man is one
48 Fashion line
50 Suitable
51 Peaks: abbr.



CRYPTOQUIP

W Z H - H Y W Z H X Z M Y O
X L S S K F M K - T D Z L Q Z M J
R J T L D D Z F L S M Z J J
T Y Q O Z M Z Q T Z

Yesterday's Cryptquip: SAID PURPOSEFUL EMPLOYEE AT MACARONI FACTORY: IT'S ALL SO CUT AND DRIED.

Today's Cryptquip clue: W equals G

The Cryptquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.