



IM Ziaur Rahman of Biman (L) makes a move during the final round engagement of the First Division chess league yesterday.

Real coup as Gullit buys Ba

NEWCASTLE, Dec 20 (Mail/Internet) — Newcastle manager Ruud Gullit was celebrating last night after beating Real Madrid to sign Milan's French winger Ibrahim Ba for £5.5 million.

Ba, 25, flew in from Rome to complete the deal on Tuesday and disappoint the European champions.

His decision confirmed Gullit's belief that Newcastle are now regarded as one of England's elite clubs.

The exciting Frenchman is likely to be paraded for the Toon Army before today's game with Leicester at St James' Park.

He looks certain to make his Premiership debut alongside Alan Shearer and Duncan Ferguson in the Boxing Day clash with Leeds.

Gullit had earlier kept his cards close to his chest, saying: "You never sell the fur of a bear before you've shot it." But then he joked: "I have brought my cannon with me!"

The signing of Ba, together with the £8m purchase of Scottish striker Duncan Ferguson, means that Gullit has spent virtually all the £15m collected from outgoing deals since he took over in August.

Ba, banished to the Milan bench after falling out with coach Alberto Zaccaroni, said: "I want to play in England. Even in the Premiership the pressure

is not the same as playing in Italy."

Ba, born in Senegal, was a surprising absentee from the French World Cup-winning squad last summer. But the bleached-blond winger is seen as a logical replacement for Keith Gillespie, who joined Blackburn for £2.35m this week with Gullit's approval.

The Newcastle boss added: "It wasn't a difficult decision to sell Gillespie. The club offered him a new contract, but after a while he refused to sign it so I knew he wanted to leave. Keith had a bit of a difficult time recently and he would have been able to leave on a free at the end of the season so we made a good deal out of it. I'm still looking for players in a number of positions. I hope to do some shopping and get somebody else in before Christmas."

I had only made one signing before Ba and I need more new players to raise the level here. The club is a sleeping giant but it wants to be awake."

Gullit, who insisted preparations for today's game had not been disturbed by takeover talks, was buoyed by the news that Shearer looks certain to bounce back from a five-week hamstring injury. But the England skipper is unlikely to link up with Ferguson, who has missed training because of flu.

The £23m duo have yet to play together, but Gullit said: "That's life. Having Alan back is a boost, just as having Steve

Howey and Shay Given fit is a boost. I know the team I want to put out."

Matt Elliott, Leicester's Scottish central defender, is hoping that Ferguson's move to Newcastle will help persuade the centre forward to end his self-imposed international boycott. Elliott may want the former Everton icon to miss today's Premiership clash, but he said: "It would be great to see Duncan playing again for Scotland."

We could certainly use his striking skills and power and I'm sure our manager Craig Brown would welcome him with open arms.

There wouldn't be a problem with the rest of the squad because they know he is one of the most fearsome strikers in the game.

He is not a Bergkamp, Shearer or Zola. He is very much his own man but I don't think he is as powerful as I don't believe there's anyone better."

Elliott, back in defence after a stand-in spell at centre forward, added: "Duncan's got the presence and personality to become a Tyneside hero. The fans up there will love him for his rebellious attitude and passionate nature."

Leicester, Worthington Cup semi-finalists, are able to watch Elliott back to his more customary role now that veteran striker Tony Cottee is fit again. Cottee had been out of action for a month with a thigh injury.

Leonine, Biman battle for title

Leonine and Biman will vie in a title-deciding play-off match today as they are locked at 43.5 points each after 13 rounds in the First Division chess league, reports APB.

The play-off encounter between the defending champions, Leonine, and the runner-up, Biman, will be held at 11 am. In the league meeting, the two sides drew 2-2.

Two-Grand-Master-studded Leonine beat Narayanjan CPA 3.5-0.5 with GM Sulman, GM Rausis and Rafiqul winning their boards and Kayes sharing points with his opponents in the other boards in the last round engagements at NSC yesterday.

Biman, who were following the leaders with 39.5 points at the end of the 12th round, outplayed Nakhalpara Jubo Sangha 4-0.

Biman's IMs Ziaur Rahman and Rezaul Haq outwitted Zamilur Rahman, Din Mohammad, Aminul Islam and Kazi Taherul Islam.

Titas Club retained their third position with 34 points after sharing points with Dhaka University 2-2 in this round. Kamalapur Samaj Kalyan became fourth with 26.5 while Mahakhal Pradip Sangha held the fifth position with 25.5 points.

In the other matches, Ansars beat Anushlon 3-1, Kamalapur edged past Mahakhal Pradip Sangha 2.5-1.5, Sonali Bank settled for a 2-2 draw with Brothers Union while Farashganj SC blanked West Jatrabari 4-0.

Goikoetxea retires

PAMPLONA, Spain, Dec 20 (Reuters/Internet) — Former Barcelona, Athletic Bilbao and Spanish international midfielder Andoni Goikoetxea announced his retirement on Sunday.

Goikoetxea, 33, returned to Spain recently after spending eight months in Japan with the Yokohama Marinos.

"Physically I am in good shape and I could carry on playing for another year," Goikoetxea said.

"But the truth is I am not very motivated... and I want to enjoy more time with my family and friends."

Goikoetxea was a member of Barcelona's 1992 European Cup winning team and Spain's 1994 World Cup squad. He was capped 56 times.

European football report

UNDATED, Dec 20 (Reuters/AP) — Chelsea became the leaders in England, Bayern Munich went eight points clear at the top in the German Bundesliga, Deportivo la Coruna maintained their impressive unbeaten home record in Spain while in France, Marseille took a three point lead over second placed Bordeaux in Saturday's European soccer action.

ENGLAND: Chelsea moved to the top of the Premiership for the first time in nine years with a 2-0 home victory over Tottenham Hotspur.

Middlesbrough underlined their status as a Premier League force by beating Manchester United 3-2 in a thriller. It was Middlesbrough's first win at Old Trafford since 1930 and United's first home defeat of the season.

Chelsea and Aston Villa, who play Charlton on Monday, have 33 points, with Chelsea ahead on goal difference.

United are on 31 points with Middlesbrough up to fourth on 30. Leeds, who visit Arsenal today, are fifth on 29, ahead of West Ham on goal difference.

Chelsea, who battled back to draw 1-1 at United in midweek, had to rely on two late goals to win Saturday's bruising London Derby at Stamford Bridge.

Things turned their way after an hour when Spurs striker Chris Armstrong was sent off for a second bookable offence.

But it was not until 10 minutes from time that the breakthrough came, and again it was Uruguayan Gustavo Poyet who was the hero. The midfielder fired in his 10th goal of the season after a neat touch from player-manager Gianluca Vialli.

Norwegian Tore Andre Flo, again coming on as substitute, headed in a Dan Petrescu cross in injury time for the second.

"I've just been in the dressing room looking at the league table on TV and it feels good," said a Chelsea midfielder Jody Morris. Chelsea were last top of the table in November 1989, before the formation of the Premier League.

Liverpool found some form with a 2-0 victory over Sheffield Wednesday. Michael Owen scoring the second goal. West Ham United beat Everton 2-1, Newcastle United edged Leicester City 1-0 and Coventry drew 1-1 with Derby.

Southampton moved off the bottom with a 3-1 home victory over Wimbledon. Nottingham Forest dropped to last place after

Blackburn's Nathan Blake scored in the last minute to earn a 2-2 draw at the City ground.

Middlesbrough's success was only their second victory over United in 25 attempts and was a particularly sweet moment for manager Bryan Robson and centre back Gary Pallister, both former United heroes.

United decided to rest centre back Jaap Stam and it looked a poor decision as Boro cashed in on bad defending to lead 2-0 at half-time. Hamilton Ricard, with his 13th goal of the season, and Dean Gordon, with a superb volley from outside the box, were the marksmen.

Brian Deane silenced Old Trafford by making it 3-0 on the hour before Nicky Butt and Paul Scholes replied to produce a thrilling finale.

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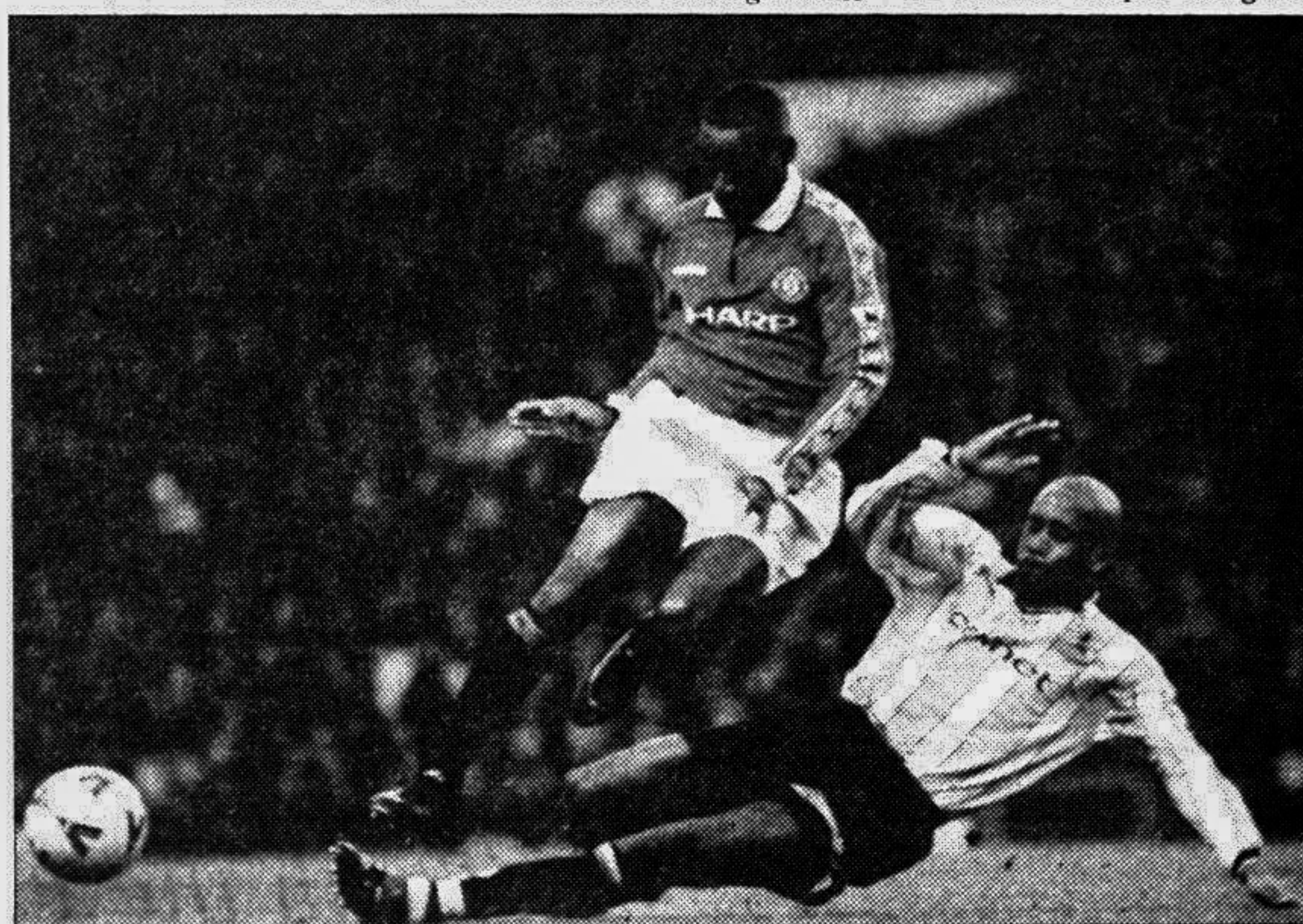
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Manchester United's Andy Cole is tackled by a Middlesbrough player. — AFP photo

equalised late on after robbing Pallister, returning for the first time to Old Trafford, but he was foiled by Middlesbrough's Australian keeper Mark Schwarzer.

"It's lovely to come back this season and get my first win here," said Robson, who spent 12 years as a player at Old Trafford.

GERMANY: Bayern crushed VfL Wolfsburg 3-0 to reach the winter break with a comfortable lead over second-placed Bayer Leverkusen.

Leverkusen, who fell 2-0 to Bayern in a top-of-the-table clash last weekend, could only manage a 1-1 draw at lowly Hansa Rostock in a tense match with three red cards.

Bayern, who have never lost a league match against Wolfsburg, moved in front with a header by Germany striker Carsten Jancker five minutes from the interval.

Brazilian Elber struck from close range in the 86th minute to join Wolfsburg's Andrzej Juskowiak in first place in the scorers' table with 11 goals.

Bosnian attacking midfielder Hasan Salihamidzic completed the demolition from the penalty spot in the dying moments.

Bayern have 44 points from 18 games and Leverkusen 36. Champions Kaiserslautern are third on 34 points after drawing 1-1 with TSV 1860 Munich, fourth on 32. The Bundesliga resumes on February 19.

Defender Boris Zivkovic put Leverkusen in front by heading home a Carsten Ramelow corner in the 39th minute.

Rostock were reduced to 10 men when midfielder and captain Timo LANGE received his

box and he scored.

The lead only lasted a minute due to a controversial penalty. Betis defender Tomas Olas was judged to have unfairly challenged Noredine Naybet in the box and Djalminda scored from the spot.

After an entertaining second half, both sides found the net again in the final five minutes.

Deportivo's Argentine international defender Gabriel Schurrer slotted home a Fran Perez corner in the 85th minute but Real Betis salvaged a point thanks to a bullet-like header from second half substitute Oli Alvarez in the 89th minute.

FRANCE: Marseille went into the winter on a winning note after beating Le Havre 2-0.

Robert Pires, signed from Metz in pre-season, continued his fine form with a goal in each half to clinch the points at the Stade Velodrome.

Bordeaux thrashed Metz 6-0 — the biggest win of the season so far to stay in touch with the leaders.

Lilian Laslandes scored a hat-trick while Johan Micoud scored twice and Sylvain Wiltord another.

The race for the championship is a clear two-horse race with Marseille on 47 points and Bordeaux on 44.

Lyon and Rennes are joint third on 32 points.

Lyon leapt to third place with a fine 1-0 win at Monaco, thanks to a goal from Polish midfielder Jakub Bak.

Rennes picked up a 1-1 draw at Strasbourg.

Cedric Bardon scored a first half goal for Rennes, but Denny Cotech equalised in the second half.

Powerhouse Paris Saint-

duced to 10 men for the final 50 minutes.

AZ took the lead in the 21st minute through Max Huiberts, and De Graafschap appeared deep in trouble when midfielder Michael Nok was sent off in the 40th minute. But the Olaf Lindenberg equalised just before halftime and the "Super Farmers" from Doetinchem for its ninth draw of the season.

In the day's other match, second-placed Vitesse Arnhem shared a 0-0 draw with sixth-placed FC Twente.

On Friday night, SC Heerenveen drew with 13th-placed MVV Maastricht 1-1.

Ekhtabati gave Heerenveen the lead in the 51st minute but Brazilian Emerson scored in the 70th minute to equalize.

'Give Platt a chance' pleads Vialli

LONDON, Dec 20 (Mail/Internet) — Chelsea manager Gianluca Vialli has called on the Italian FA to show common sense over their ban on David Platt taking over as boss of Sampdoria because he does not have the Serie A coaching qualification.

The ban was imposed after protests from other Serie A coaches and former England captain Platt, who is studying for his English coaching badge, will be sitting in the stand in a hastily-arranged role of "super-visor" when Sampdoria play AC Milan in Genoa tomorrow.

Arsene Wenger, Platt's last manager at Arsenal, is less certain that Sampdoria were right to appoint an untried, unqualified boss.

Velappan indicates changes

BANGKOK, Dec 20 (Reuters/Internet) — Big changes are likely to the Asian Games soccer tournament, won by the powerful Iranian World Cup squad, before the next Games in Pusan, South Korea in 2002, Asian Football Union chief Peter Velappan said on Sunday.

"We have to bring a little more order into the tournament to ensure the quality and better attendance," said Velappan, secretary general of the Asian Football Confederation (AFC).

The quality of the 23 teams which battled for one of the most sought after medals at the Games ranged from Iran, the only Asian team to win a match at the World Cup finals in France this year, to Mongolia, which suffered a humiliating 10-0 defeat at the hands of defending champions Uzbekistan.

"Scores like that don't help football," Velappan said.

He said the changes would be discussed with the Olympic

Council of Asia (OCA), which has overall charge of the Games. They would have to cover qualification, the level of the teams competing, and easing the playing schedule.

Iran and the losers of Saturday's final, Kuwait, had played eight games in 20 days by the end of the tournament, a punishing schedule that no other competition would tolerate, especially in tropical Thai temperatures which soared regularly above 30 degrees Celsius (90 Fahrenheit).

Such a plan would mean the qualifying teams would be of a reasonably similar standard, the level of competition in the early rounds would be higher and fans more likely to attend.

At the Bangkok Games, even though early round robin group matches were played around Thailand, attendance was thin — except when the host country was playing.

Once the early rounds were over of the way and the quarter-finals began, the Asian Games

provided some very good football which impressed even England legend Sir Bobby Charlton.

He watched the match of the tournament — Thailand's astonishing 2-1, nine-man, extra-time quarter-final win over South Korea, Woul Cup 2002 co-hosts with Japan, with a goal that would have had fans anywhere gasping in disbelief.

"I was very, very happy with what I saw. That was one of the best games I've seen in Asia, a great improvement on anything I've seen in Asia for a long time," he said.

Velappan said that was true, but he backed the complaints of most coaches that the schedule was way too heavy, especially for those who brought young players.

"If you take the eight teams which reached the quarter-finals, you have seen significant progress in Asian football with a much higher standard than you've seen before," he said.



Syed Ashfaqul Haque, senior sub-editor of The Daily Star, married Tanya Khondkar at Dhaka last Friday.

The Daily Star TV Guide

Monday 21st December

(All programmes are in local time. The Daily Star will not be responsible for any change in the programme)

BBC WORLD

6:00 BBC World News Followed by Weather 6:30 World Living: Top Gear: Steve Berry Travels to look at Japan's new Grand Cherokee; and Vicky Butler-Henderson considers the tiny tearaway Tommy Kaira ZZ sports car, made in Britain for the Japanese market 7:00 BBC News Followed by Weather 7:30 Asia Today: The latest news, analysis and features from the BBC Correspondents who live and work in the region 8:45 USA Direct: From New York, Brian Barron and Melinda Wittstock look back across the last seven days in news, entertainment and sport from across the USA 9:00 BBC News Followed by Weather 9:30 Asia Today: The latest news, analysis and features from the BBC Correspondents who live and work in the region 9:45 USA Direct: From New York, Brian Barron and Melinda Wittstock look back across the last seven days in news, entertainment and sport from across the USA 10:00 BBC News Followed by Weather 10:30 Asia Today: The latest news, analysis and features from the BBC Correspondents who live and work in the region 11:30 World Focus: Correspondent: In a special programme Jeremy Bowen exposes the role that political mayhem and corruption inside the Palestinian Authority has played in undermining the prospects for peace in the Middle East 12:00 BBC World News Followed by Weather 12:30 World Living: Earth Report China: Reports include China's dead river systems; medicine alternatives to tiger bones; and return visit to the Guanzhong Valley 1:00 BBC World News Followed by Weather 1:30 Hardtalk Women Of The World Bianca Jagger: Tim Sebastian talks to Human Rights activist Bianca Jagger about her current work helping Bosnia's disenfranchised — and her time as wife of Rock Mick Jagger 2:00 BBC World News Followed by Weather 2:30 World Focus: Correspondent: In a special programme Jeremy Bowen exposes the role that political mayhem and corruption inside the Palestinian Authority has played in undermining the prospects for peace in the Middle East 3:00 BBC World News Followed by Weather 3:30 Hardtalk Women Of The World Bianca Jagger: Tim Sebastian talks to Human Rights activist Bianca Jagger about her current work helping Bosnia's disenfranchised — and her time as wife of Rock Mick Jagger 4:00 BBC World News Followed by Weather 4:30 World Living: Top Gear 5:00 The World Today: The latest news, analysis and features from the BBC Correspondents who live and work in the region 5:45 USA Direct: From New York, Brian Barron and Melinda Wittstock look back across the last seven days in news, entertainment and sport from across the USA 6:00 BBC News Followed by Weather 6:30 Asia Today: The latest news, analysis and features from the BBC Correspondents who live and work in the region 6:45 USA Direct: From New York, Brian Barron and Melinda Wittstock look back across the last seven days in news, entertainment and sport from across the USA 7:00 BBC News Followed by Weather 7:30 Asia Today: The latest news, analysis and features from the BBC Correspondents who live and work in the region 7:45 USA Direct: From New York, Brian Barron and Melinda Wittstock look back across the last seven days in news, entertainment and sport from across the USA 8:00 BBC News Followed by Weather 8:30 Asia Today: The latest news, analysis and features from the BBC Correspondents who live and work in the region 8:45 USA Direct: From New York, Brian Barron and Melinda Wittstock look back across the last seven days in news, entertainment and sport from across the USA 9:00 BBC News Followed by Weather 9:30 Asia Today: The latest news, analysis and features from the BBC Correspondents who live and work in the region 9:45 USA Direct: From New York, Brian Barron and Melinda Wittstock look back across the last seven days in news, entertainment and sport from across the USA 10:00 BBC News Followed by Weather 10:30 Asia Today: The latest news, analysis and features from the BBC Correspondents who live and work in the region 11:30 World Focus: Correspondent: In a special programme Jeremy Bowen exposes the role that political mayhem and cor-

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